DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 413 SO 024 238

AUTHOR	Davidoff, Sue, Ed.; And Others
TITLE	Emancipatory Education and Action Research. Action Research Series No. 1.
INSTITUTION	Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria (South Africa).
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-7969-1535-0
PUB DATE	93
NOTE	153p.
AVAILABLE FROM	HSRC Publishers, Private Bag X41, Pretoria 0001, South Africa.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - General (020)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Action Research; Art Education; Didacticism; Educational Improvement; Educational Research; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Social Action; *Social Change; Social Theories; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS	*Emancipatory Learning; *South Africa

ABSTRACT

This book is the result of a seminar on emancipatory education and the action research projects in the Department of Didactics at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa. The book starts with questions regarding the nature of action research. This first chapter discusses the meaning of some crucial organizing concepts, asks questions regarding the fields in which one might undertake action research, and examines the understanding of emancipation. The second chapter contextualizes the work that was the focus of the seminar. The third chapter problematizes disciplinary knowledge-making with regard to the practice of People's Education and action research. This chapter touches on three issues: (1) the producers of knowledge; (2) the types of knowledge that are used; and (3) the kind of teaching and learning materials that are employed. Chapters 4-8, in a certain sense, form a separate section of the work in that they treat the practice of emancipatory action research as and where it occurs in actual institutionalized education situations, as well as in schools and other institutions in the wider sense. Chapter 4 focuses on emancipatory education practice in art education. Chapters 5 and 10 look at the use of socially critical action research in promoting greater measures of reflective teaching in preservice teacher education. Chapter 6 presents a case study that addresses the difference between the democratic rhetoric that teachers often use outside of their classrooms, and the authoritarian manner that many of them adopt in the teaching situation. Chapters 7-9 focus on the challenges that face emancipatory action research in South Africa. The final chapter, 11, provides an overview. (DK)

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EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION AND ACTION RESEARCH

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Editors:
Sue Davidoff
Cyril Julie
Dirk Meerkotter
Maureen Robinson

Human Sciences Research Council
Pretoria
1993

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ISBN 0–7969–1535–0

First published 1993

Cover design: G. Basson

Electronic data capture: Susan Smith

Published by:

HSRC Publishers
Private Bag X41
PRETORIA
0001

Printed and bound by Sigma Press (Pty) Ltd, Pretoria

PREFACE

Purpose of seminar[1]

Since the early eighties a number of people in the Western Cape, first at the University of Cape Town and later at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), have been working in the field of emancipatory education in general, and more specifically in emancipatory action research. There has, however, not always been the opportunity to reflect collectively on one's work and thoughts regarding liberatory teaching and learning in schools and classrooms - or in any other situations and institutions for that matter.

Apart from the fact that action researchers in the Western Cape as a whole do not regularly, get together to share ideas related to emancipatory action research, we found that even those of us who work on projects within the Department of Didactics at UWC hardly ever managed to find the time to discuss our work with one another. Not that we would expect major disagreements regarding a notion that the concept of "emancipatory action research" involves more than the teacher simply understanding her own practice as an individual person. But, an emancipatory approach to action research would also be about the democratisation of social situations and that the purpose thereof – without being romantic about what could be achieved – would be to bring about change in a wider social context as well. In spite of that, we would like to believe that all of us are engaged in projects aimed at school and classroom practices which might, hopefully, lead to forms of democratic participation by all involved, the need to reflect on a more frequent basis about where we *think* we might be; what our understanding is of where we *really* are; and to *what extent* we actually can succeed in bringing about change.

How our work relates to emancipatory action research projects elsewhere has also not always been adequately discussed. One of the interesting differences between some action research projects in the Department of Didactics at UWC and efforts to bring about educational change in many other parts of the world, is the overt emphasis on the political role of the teacher.

We therefore saw this seminar as an opportunity to discuss our work at the University reflectively and rigorously, particularly in respect of emancipatory education and the action research projects in the Department of Didactics. That most of the participants in the seminar would be post-graduate students, researchers from the Human Sciences Research Council and university teachers working in the area of emancipatory education (e.g. the Master's Programme in Action Research and School Improvement, introduced by Prof. Owen van den Berg in 1987); the Materials Development Project; and the Action Research Project, did not distract from the fact that all were very conscious of the reality that, in the end, our work remains hollow and meaningless without the teachers in the field. And it is essential that this seminar be followed by others – where teachers and other action researchers who work, or would like to work, towards democratising the school and school classroom can contribute to the establishment of a forum in which networking forms part of the basis. However, the immediate purpose of the two days' proceedings was:

* To discuss our ideas regarding emancipatory education and action research.
* To reflect on what we do in our own research practices and to think critically about what the implications thereof might be for education ... teachers, students and the community as a whole.
* To look at the context in which we work and to establish whether there is a link between the purpose of the People's Education Movement and the "mission" of what could eventually become the emancipatory education/action research project - in some or the other form - of the Western Cape.
* To publish the proceedings of this seminar/workshop so that the ideas we have expressed can become public for critique and be shared with others working for the democratisation of teaching and learning situations.

The book, and this is basically in line with the purpose of the seminar referred to above, starts with some interesting questions by Wally Morrow, Dean of the Faculty of Education, regarding the nature of action research. He writes that the popularity of action research in the field of teaching has as its main inspiration a "disillusionment" with traditional research in education which has, in spite of generations of "rigorous" effort and lavish resources devoted to it, done little to fulfil its "promises". In his contribution Morrow dwells on the meaning of some crucial organizing concepts; asks questions regarding the fields in which one might undertake action research; our understanding of "emancipation"; and ends the first chapter with a confession that his thoughts about the topic have simply raised further riddling questions which he expected the workshop to address and to contribute to the answering thereof.

The second chapter contextualises the work which was the focus of the seminar. Dirk Meerkotter refers to the purpose of this chapter as having to reflect on the extent to which the action research projects generally associated with UWC's Department of Didactics relate to the struggles waged by organisations such as the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC) and its student and teacher affiliates. To be more specific, How do the mentioned action research programmes contribute to sustain and further develop the ideas and underlying transformatory ethos of People's Education as expressed (since 1985) by NECC conferences and conventions?

Cyril Julie problematizes disciplinary knowledge-making with regard to the practice of People's Education and action research in the third chapter. He touches in a challenging way on the following three issues: the "producers" of knowledge, the type(s) of knowledge that is/are used, and the kind of teaching and learning materials which are employed. He points out that the intention of his questions is not that the emancipatory action research project should test its movement in line with the concerns of "content" in People's Education. Rather, the intention is to provide a sounding board for the project for the development of its research agenda.

Chapters four to eight, in a certain sense, form a separate section of the work in that they treat the practice of emancipatory action research as and where it occurs in actual institutionalised education situations (such as classrooms specifically), as well as in schools and other institutions in the wider sense. Sandra Kriel's contribution in Chapter Four on emancipatory education practice in art education is informed largely by Habermas's "knowledge-constitutive interests" which are addressed in a more theoretical way by Johann Mouton in

Chapter Ten. The fifth chapter is concerned with the efforts of Cassiem Savahl to use what he calls "socially critical action research", in order to promote greater measures of reflective teaching in pre-service teacher education at a House of Representatives ("Coloured Affairs") college of education. Trevor van Louw presents a case study in the following chapter which addresses the difference between the democratic rhetoric that teachers often use outside of their classrooms, and the authoritarian manner which many of them adopt in the teaching and learning situation. Both Chapter Seven and Eight take as their focus the challenges that face emancipatory action research in South Africa. In Chapter Seven June Pym takes a conscious and "on the ground" look at some of the issues and realities, rather than the answers, that are facing an emancipatory action research style of education. Maureen Robinson, in the spirit of the purpose of the workshop, entitles the eighth chapter "Action research and the challenge of change". She has coordinated the small but very influential initiative known as the Materials Development Project in the Department of Didactics for the last four years, and uses her experience in the field of teacher development as a basis for commenting on some challenges facing emancipatory action research in our country today.

The ninth chapter serves as a bridge between the previous five chapters on emancipatory educational practice and the challenges facing emancipatory action research in particular in a changing South African socio-political context. In "Emancipatory action research in South Africa: Fanning the fires of theory and practice", Sue Davidoff concludes by stating that:

> *... (she) would like to tread with caution around the seemingly absolute claims that Grundy and Carr and Kemmis tend to make about emancipatory action research: "symmetrical communication"; "true consensus"; "control of education" ... and perhaps think, in our context, more fluidly about first steps like teachers welcoming "outsiders" into their classrooms, or wanting to become more creative, or actively engaging in materials development. These gains, it would seem to (her), are real steps towards emancipation.*

Much of the work referred to in the preceding chapters is based on an often uncritical acceptance of Habermas's thoughts regarding emancipation. In a critical analysis, Johann Mouton in Chapter Ten ("Critical social science and the emancipatory interest") points out that, according to Fay, Habermas's

> *... notion of emancipation – with the concomitant ideals of enlightenment and empowerment – has been built on a very optimistic and also unrealistic ontology of human nature. An ontology that ignores the other side of human nature. His plea is that we must recognize the limits to human reason, the facts of dependency, concealment and repression, which all form part of being human.*

Melanie Walker had been asked to deliver an international overview paper on emancipatory action research as an introduction to the proceedings of the seminar, which she did. However, the editors were of the opinion that for the book, the overview should come as a final chapter. The reason being that one not so much wanted to measure what we do against an international yardstick, but rather that we inform the reader about our own work, our own views on emancipatory education, and how that would connect to the struggle for education in South Africa in general and in the Western Cape to be more specific - and then to look at that against what is happening elsewhere. The relation between Melanie Walker's "Pragmatists, sceptics, evangelists, idealists? Towards shaping a critical tradition of action research in the South African context" and the other contributions made during the two days is captured in her final paragraph with the statement that the question we need to ask is not so much, What is emancipatory research?, but rather:

- Who, and what purposes does our work serve, and
- Whose problems do we try to understand through our research?

The section – "Seminar reflections" – by Cyril Julie, Ashiek Manie, Joanna Nkosi and Brenda Sonn addresses questions and issues raised in the seminar. This report does not only link with the first chapter by Wally Morrow when it again refers to the primacy of reflection in action research, but also, in a very logical way leads into the Postscript by Owen van den Berg who was on sabbatical at the time of the workshop and wrote his "Reflections of a non-participant" after he had seen the proceedings in a completed form. Owen van den Berg divides his Postscript into the following sections: "Insiders and outsiders", "Innovation", "The hegemony of theory", the importance of "rich descriptions and interpretations of the action engaged in", and "The personal". Allow me to conclude this preface with the following quotation from the Postscript:

> *In the ongoing debates concerning the relative impact of structure and agency in bringing about change we need to make sure that our sense of agency does not reside in an ideologized view of human beings that would deny their personal histories and their propensity and power to make sense of the world in ways other than we consider functional for change. Change, in Fullan's truism* (1991:65), *is "technically simple and socially complex"*.

Dirk Meerkotter
Cape Town
14 August 1993

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1 The contribution of the Centre for Science Development (CSD) of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) to the success of the seminar held on 18 an 19 November 1992 is acknowledged. The Council did not only make the seminar and publication of the proceedings financially possible, but also played an important part in the debates and discussions around the issues raised during the two days in Cape Town.

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CONTENTS

Preface – *Dirk Meerkotter* i

Chapter 1 Introductory remarks – *Wally Morrow* 1

Chapter 2 The NECC, People's Education and emancipatory action research at the University of the Western Cape – *Dirk Meerkotter* 9

Chapter 3 People's Education, action research and disciplinary knowledge-making – *Cyril Julie* 25

Chapter 4 Advancing emancipatory practices in art education – *Sandra Kriel* 33

Chapter 5 What kind of knowing is socially critical action research? – *Cassiem Savahl* 43

Chapter 6 Aksienavorsing en die verandering van klaskamerpratkyk: 'n Gevallestudie – *Trevor van Louw* 55

Chapter 7 Some challenges facing emancipatory action research in South Africa – *June Pym* 61

Chapter 8 Action research and the challenge of change – *Maureen Robinson* 67

Chapter 9 Emancipatory action research in South Africa: Fanning the fires of theory and practice – *Sue Davidoff* 75

Chapter 10 Critical social science and the emancipatory interest – *Johann Mouton* 85

Chapter 11 Pragmatists, sceptics, evangelists, idealists? Towards shaping a critical tradition of action research in the South African context – *Melanie Walker* 99

Seminar Reflections – *Cyril Julie, Ashiek Manie, Joanna Nkosi and Brenda Sonn* 125

Postscript Reflections of a non-participant – *Owen van den Berg* 127

Chapter 1

Introductory remarks

Wally Morrow

At a recent conference of the Association for Teacher Education in Europe I was struck by the frequent references to action research. Action research has been part of the intellectual climate of thinking about teaching for some time now, but it seems to be gathering a new wave of popularity, at least amongst teacher educators in Europe. This workshop, and the action research community which has been built up over the past few years here in the Western Cape, catch that wave.

The popularity of action research in the field of teaching has as one of its main inspirations disillusionment with "traditional" research in education. Such disillusionment has dawned slowly, and this is itself interesting. Traditional research generates a picture of "research" which ensnares our understanding – a move out of that picture risks being interpreted as an abandonment of research itself, and this threatens those who undertake action research with the loss of the prestige attached to the idea of research in our world.

Traditional educational research was constructed on the basis of the idea that research and practice, or theory and its application, are logically independent of each other. This organizing idea generates a division of labour between researchers and theorists on the one side, and practitioners and the application of theory on the other (we don't here need any reminding of the way in which this division of labour parallels the differential professional status of those who occupy these two positions).

In the field of teaching, in spite of generations of rigorous effort and lavish resources devoted to it, traditional research has done little to fulfil its promise. The practice of teaching has not been significantly improved through this immense effort. Action research can be seen as an attempt to find a different vision of how we might improve the practice of teaching, a vision organized around the idea that research and practice are logical bedfellows.

One central feature of the emerging tradition of action research is the idea of practitioners critically reflecting on their own practices. Anyone in the game will know that such critical reflection, if it runs deeply enough to do its work, can be extremely uncomfortable; as practitioners, by opening ourselves to critical reflection we place our own self-understandings on the line, and we have an inbuilt resistance to acknowledging some of what critical reflection might reveal to us about our practices and, thus, about ourselves. It takes some courage to become a critically self-reflective practitioner, and some talent not to lose our way in the maze of considerations which are likely to come to light.

In addition, a tradition of collective critical self-reflection is in a state of tension with our convictions about the importance of unity and solidarity in the face of a systematically hostile institutional, social and political environment. We have a tendency to think of criticism, even self-criticism, as potentially fragmenting, a weakening of our strength. We have to learn that critical disagreement is not a suburb of disharmony, but that, on the contrary, it is the lifeblood of a critical community. We have to come to understand that critical discussion is a way of thinking together, rather than a competition in which there are winners and losers, or a form of negotiation or mediation. We must realise that disagreement presupposes harmony at a deeper level, and in this way, paradoxically, serves to reveal and reinforce the shared convictions which bind us together.

I hope I can depend on a tradition of critical reflection in this company and that you will not be offended by some of the introductory remarks I make here. I hope, too, that you will forgive the primitive understanding of the field of action research out of which some of my remarks might arise.

I would like to pose four questions which I think might be relevant to the central purpose of this workshop, and say a few brief words about each.

What are we doing?

This is the original spur, a seminal question, for any critical reflection about our practices. But the question itself is not without its complexities. In trying to answer it in any particular case we commit ourselves to controversial claims in the field of a theory of human action.

If we are behaviourists we will say that a spectator is in a better position than the actor herself to answer the question about what the actor is doing, and that the spectator's stance provides us with the standard with which to judge the objectivity of the answer given. In reaction to this radical undermining of the actor's responsibility for her own actions, of her shaping agency in relation to the practices in which she is a participant, we might retreat to the subjectivist stance, which claims that only the actor herself can answer the question about what she is doing. The subjectivist stance underlies the conviction, deeply held by some, that there can be no such thing as an objective evaluation of teaching, that if the teacher thinks that what she is doing is right that is all there is to be said about it.

Action research moves out of this objective-subjective dichotomy and in so doing out of the theories of human action constructed around it. Action research holds that a proper answer to the question "What are you doing" involves both the actual consequences and effects of actions and the self-understanding of the agent – neither the spectator's nor the participant's stance is sufficient. A further dimension is added by the consideration that the agent's self-understanding cannot be private or idiosyncratic – it is necessarily a shared understanding. To the extent that someone's answer to the question "What are you doing" involves a denial of its actual consequences, or too radical a departure from what others can understand, we would say that they do not understand what they are doing.

As we move away from isolated actions towards the world of social practices, the rôle of shared understanding becomes even more salient. Practices are on-going, shared patterns of activity, and the identity of any practice (what distinguishes that practice from any other) and what can count as participating in that practice, depends on the concepts which constitute the practice.

The purpose of this workshop is to critically reflect on "emancipatory action research". One important part of this project will be to try to achieve greater clarity about what is meant by this term. The crucial organising concepts involved here are action research and emancipation, neither of them transparent.

What do we mean by these crucial organizing concepts?

There is no single way of clarifying concepts but I shall suggest a procedure in this context. There are two preliminary points we must note. One is that we cannot simply decide what we will mean by these concepts, we have to discover what we mean. Another is that concepts are not abstract intellectual items, they are the shapers of our understanding and practices. This is one reason why formal definitions are frequently of such little help. Concepts are involved in our practical judgements, and sometimes one way to try to get clarity about our concepts is to consider the judgements we make, or would make. A tool for such an investigation is to discover the right questions. I do not know whether the two questions I now pose are pertinent. I am sure, however, that you will be able to suggest other questions, some of which might be much sharper, and thus more fruitful for the investigation.

In which fields might we do action research?

We assume that it is possible to perform action research in the field of teaching, but in what other fields might it be possible? This question puts the concept of action research under a spotlight and therefore might enable us to discern its shape more clearly. Action research is aimed at the improvement of practice and undertaken by participants in that practice. But this doesn't take us very far, as the consideration of a few examples will show.

Is it possible to perform action research in the fields of cycling, playing tennis or musical performance? These are familiar practices, and they are practices in which there can be some improvement; not only individual improvement, but improvement of the practices themselves.

Could people trying to learn how to ride a bicycle be described as doing action research? After all, they try something out, see if it works, if it doesn't they try something else. They are engaging in actions with a view to improvement in the practice of bicycle riding. Why is this not a case of action research? Perhaps we think that something like bicycle riding depends too much on the body, that what someone trying to learn how to ride a bicycle needs to learn is not under their deliberate control. "Taking thought" as opposed to trying first one thing then another seems to play a minor rôle in this case, and perhaps this is why it doesn't look much like a case of action research.

Consider a breathtaking tennis player like John McEnroe. Can he be admitted to the action research community? His uncompromising and passionate commitment to excellence in the practice of tennis playing ran him into a lot of trouble, and we might even have some reason to say that his participation revealed previously unrealised possibilities in the practice. But it seems odd to think of him as doing action research. Why? Would our judgement change if we were told that he spent time both on and off the court, critically reflecting on his engagement in the practice – that he reviewed and analyzed thousands of hours of video, in critical company and alone, in slow and fast motion, to discover innovative strategies? I don't think even these additions would persuade us that he was doing action research. But why not? Perhaps because a practice like playing tennis has a relatively uncontested goal?

Think, then, of a practice like musical performance, in which the goal is not nearly so clear-cut. Could we describe Yehudi Menuhin, for instance, as having done action research in the practice of violin playing? His participation in this practice might be said to have redefined our understanding of the goal of this practice. Could this be a reason to say that he was doing action research? This sounds unlikely, but again, why is this so?

If we say that these are not examples of action research, then what grounds do we have for this judgement? With only an elementary understanding of action research, perhaps all I can do is to make the following brief suggestions and then leave the question to your more informed consideration.

Perhaps we talk about action research only in relation to practices which depend in some essential way on human relationships, and in which the rôle of the participants' understanding in shaping the practice is more central than it is in the case of cycling, tennis or violin playing. Perhaps we can undertake action research only in relation to practices which are more firmly embedded in shared professional traditions and a structure of institutions? In this case, I might not be on the right track at all, but still I think that the question of in which fields it might be appropriate to think that there is a possibility of action research is one which can prompt us to become clearer about the concept of action research.

What do we mean by emancipation?

The second main organising concept in the field is that of *emancipation*. Again we have a concept which is far from transparent, and which has a history that places broad boundaries around its meaning. Let me begin by saying that I think that there is indeed a conceptual connection between education and emancipation, although this doesn't take us very far as these concepts are both opaque.

Perhaps our paradigmatic use of the concept of emancipation is in relation to the freeing of slaves during the nineteenth century. For a slave to be emancipated meant his or her release from the legal restrictions of slavery; but much more profoundly, it was a change from the status of being a chattel, a piece of property which could be owned by someone, to being acknowledged as a person with the moral claims attaching to that description.

Emancipation is not equivalent to political liberation, although – as the example of the emancipation of slaves brings out – there might be some connection between the two. Marx, in talking about the extension of the franchise to the labouring classes, distinguished between "merely political liberation" and human emancipation – and he insisted that the revolution is involved with the latter. Although political liberation might be a step in that direction, it was only a step and not the goal.

Missionaries, of course, are also in the business of emancipation. Talking somewhat loosely, we might say that the missionary's conception of emancipation is that of bringing truth and enlightenment to the ignorant and benighted. The key point here is that the missionary is quite convinced that she has the truth, and that it is her sacred duty to transmit that truth to those who do not yet have it, even if they resist. A characteristic of a missionary is that she thinks of emancipation in terms of changing attitudes, as opposed to changing institutions. Certainly, in its more sophisticated versions action research is quite clear that there is an intimate relation between institutions and the practices they house, and that emancipation involves both. Nonetheless, the temptation to fall into the missionary mode is ever-present amongst those imbued with the ideal of "improving" teaching, especially, perhaps, if their understanding is constructed around the concept of emancipation. There are probably similar temptations in the field of action research, especially if its self-understanding of action research is linked with some authoritative figure – like Habermas perhaps. It takes courage to think for oneself.

Perhaps Madonna provides a contemporary example of someone in the business of emancipation. She could be seen as trying to emancipate people from their deep guilt about their interest in pornography and erotica, an emancipation which some people might bitterly resist because they feel that something precious is being lost. In an important sense there is a parallel here with the gay revolution over the past few decades. That revolution can be described as emancipating gays of all genders from their previous guilt about their sexual preferences and it has given rise to greater toleration of difference in some social groups.

In the field of the professional development of teachers we might perhaps say that action research is an attempt to show teachers how they might contribute to their own and their colleagues' emancipation from their habitual modes of engagement in the practice of teaching.

And, thereby, perhaps enable themselves to develop a teaching practice which has a chance of contributing to the emancipation of those whom they teach.

I have to confess that as I write these sentences they simply raise further riddling questions but I expect that this workshop will contribute to the solving of some of those riddles.

Chapter 2

The NECC, People's Education and emancipatory action research at the University of the Western Cape

Dirk Meerkotter

Introduction and purpose of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the extent to which the action research projects generally associated with UWC's Department of Didactics link up with educational struggles waged by organisations such as the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC) and its student and teacher affiliates. More specifically, how do the mentioned action research programmes contribute to sustain and further develop the ideas and underlying transformatory ethos of People's Education, as expressed since 1985 by NECC conferences and conventions?

In addressing the question I will first, very briefly, look at the education crisis as it has developed in South Africa, specifically during the eighties, and try to locate People's Education within this context. The paper also devotes time to the development of People's Education into the early nineties. And, against the backdrop of what was happening in the education arena, it addresses the short but dynamic history and the nature of action research in the Department of Didactics. This contribution, in addition, focuses on how the action research projects relate to the development of the ideas and ideals expressed in the rhetoric, and hopefully practice, of People's Education.

The education crisis

People's Education in the South African context must be understood in the light of the post-1976 era, which started on June 16 in Soweto with a "revolution" which superficially looked like an attempt to overthrow the language policy of the National Party's

Bantu Education. It is, however, common knowledge today that the boycotting of schools since that time had to do with much more than the fact that Afrikaans was enforced as medium of instruction for half the school subjects taken in Standard 5 and Form I by the oppressed African majority. Indeed, there are few places in the world where schools, as part of an unjust and totalitarian society, have physically and ideologically taken up the struggle against political oppression to such an extent as in South Africa. The protest march on that winter day in 1976, organised by an action committee which later on became known as the Soweto Students Representative Council, resulted in police opening fire on school children. Within weeks, a nationwide uprising was in full swing with many analysts proclaiming that the South African political and educational scene would never be the same again (Christie, 1986:238-239).

In South Africa, much has changed over the years following the Soweto uprising. Trade unions, alongside religious and other social movements, increasingly mobilised their members against the apartheid structures in the country to join the education sector which comprised students more so than teachers, university lecturers and parents. In 1983 the United Democratic Front was formed as an umbrella body for some 600 organisations opposing the practices of the white minority government. The formation of the United Democratic Front was one of the factors that contributed to effective organised resistance regarding education and rent boycotts (see Bennett & Quin, 1988:8).

The issues that dominated newspaper reports in 1986 were: the Conference of the National Education Crisis Committee; People's Education; school boycotts; and the divided South African community in general. In February 1986 the *Sunday Times* reported that as far back as 1982 the African National Congress, had formulated a plan to organise and mobilise black schools through the Congress of South African Students (*Sunday Times*, 23 February 1986). In March the same newspaper stated that People's Education was functioning side-by-side with the formal education structures in some areas (*Sunday Times*, 9 March 1986).

People's education in the mid eighties

The First Education Crisis Conference, held in Johannesburg on 28 and 29 December 1985, resolved to strive for People's Education for People's Power as a new form of education for all in South Africa. It was believed that People's Education would lead to educational practices:

- Enabling the oppressed to understand the evils of the apartheid system and preparing them for participation in a non-racial, democratic system.
- Contributing to eliminate capitalist norms of competition, individualism, and to develop and encourage collective input and active participation by all.
- Eliminating illiteracy, ignorance and exploitation of any person by another.
- Equipping and training all people to participate actively and creatively in the struggle to attain People's Power in order to establish a non-racial, democratic South Africa.
- Allowing students, parents, teachers and workers to be mobilised into appropriate organisational structures.
- Enabling workers to resist exploitation and oppression at their workplace (compare SAIRR, 1985:395).

During the period preceding the 1986 Conference of the National Education Crisis Committee, Dr Gerrit Viljoen, the then Minister of Education and Training, in a reaction to the notion of People's Education made the absurd claim that the South African education system was based on educational principles accepted throughout the world. An opposition spokesperson, Mr Ken Andrew of the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), could not resist responding to the statement by saying that this was clearly not the case, as nowhere else was skin colour the basic determinant of where one attends school (*Star*, 27 March 1986). When comparing the basic principles underlying People's Education to those of the Government it is apparent that, although it is concerned with the oppressed in particular, the former's set include all the people in the country, whilst the latter has as fundamental rule – the unfair "protection" of the white minority group.

The media, especially the Afrikaans newspapers and the state-controlled South African Broadcasting Corporation, undoubtedly aided those in opposition to People's Education in the way in which they responded to the education crisis. Reports on the decision by the NECC to appeal to students for an end to school boycotts and to call for a return to the classroom after their Durban Conference in March 1986, made it seem as if some newspaper editors were so confused about what was happening in the education arena in South Africa that they found it difficult to believe that the NECC would call for a return to classrooms for reasons other than to offer People's Education from within the system (*Vaderland*, 31 March 1986; *Burger*, 31 March 1986). According to the Rev Molefe Tsele of the NECC, the Conference was in favour of a process whereby the struggle for democratic education would increasingly involve parents and teachers. Delegates decided that the best way for this to happen would be for students to attend school, so that they could engage in the process of devising new and creative teaching and learning strategies to oppose the authoritarianism of the State. This was interpreted as an attempt to further "disrupt" the "normal" education process and to promote the "revolutionary" aims of a few "radicals" (compare *Citizen*, 31 March 1986). A London newspaper showed a better understanding of the decision to call for a return to school than some of South Africa's own media. *The Guardian* of 31 March 1986 stated that:

> *What really happened in Durban this weekend amounts to a decision by responsible black adults to take the places of their own children in the front line of the battle against apartheid.*

To its credit, the *Star*, in its analysis of the situation, saw the NECC emerging as a new political voice and advised the Government to pay attention to it (31 March 1986).

A People's Education Committee elected at the Conference to examine the needs in black education and develop a new education policy within three months (*Star*, 31 March 1986), was possibly one of the most important decisions taken in education in South Africa in forty years and one that could have changed the course of education in this country radically. Unfortunately, most members of the NECC executive were arrested and the organisation restricted long before a "new" education policy could be developed. The idea, however, survived and the NECC's National Education Policy Investigation is set to release one of the most extensive education policy documents ever to be undertaken by a liberation group in South Africa – and probably the world – by the end of the year.

At the People's Education Committee's first meeting held in Johannesburg on 8 April 1986, a People's Education Secretariat was appointed (*City Press*, 15 June 1986). The convenor of the People's Education Secretariat, Mr Zwelakhe Sisulu, would, as editor of *New Nation* – a newspaper associated with the so-called alternative press – inform the community about the struggle for education and build the links between parents, teachers, students and workers. Such a strategy would contribute to the educational process of the empowerment of those "on the ground", to have their voices heard.

The true meaning of People's Education started to emerge more clearly than ever before with Sisulu's newspaper reaching out to students and workers through its supplement "Learning Nation". In an interview with the Rev Molefe Tsele, *New Nation* reported how People's Education would be implemented in South Africa. Five nationally-based commissions, each with its own secretariat comprising of teachers, students and parents, were to be set up to research and prepare curricula.

The focus of the first report was on issues such as interim administrative structures and would spell out administrative control of schools and reflect on educational policy. Classroom matters with an initial focus on History, Political Education and Teaching Method would also receive attention. Other key areas to be addressed would be:

- teacher training facilities and methods,
- the role of universities in People's Education, free prescribed books,
- the inter-relationship between education and ideology, and

- the inter-relationship between education and liberation (*New Nation*, 6 May 1986).

Due to the fact that many people viewed, and probably still view, possible changes in the schooling dispensation of South Africa in terms of what exists already, the total transformation of education as envisaged by the broad democratic movement towards a People's Education was often negatively understood by many in the dominant power groups. The main reason why they tended to experience what they heard about the emerging People's Education in such a way was to be found in the fact that Bantu Education had to be rooted out and that this threatened their privileged position in society. It would not be off the mark, I believe, to suggest that the NECC in the early months of 1986 certainly had "revolution" in mind regarding education rather than "reform" leading to "getting-better-at-apartheid" education.

One newspaper went so far as to publish the condemning words of its editor in protest against the ideas that were expressed – at the Conference and thereafter – in the objectives of People's Education. The NECC would, he said, *waaragtig* (loosely translated as "over my dead body") not be allowed to offer People's Education in government buildings via teachers who were paid by the State (*Oosterlig*, 15 May 1986). Mr Koos Sadie, Chairman of the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie (South African Teacher Union), stated that People's Education is indoctrination, an incitement to violence and had nothing to do with education (*Oosterlig*, 25 June 1986).

With reference to all the talk about People's Education and contrary to the establishment's accusations regarding the politicisation of education, Dr Neville Alexander (1987:59) at a conference on industrial relations, warned that:

> *We should not, I should like to stress, be misled by the inescapable overt emphasis placed on the political aspects of People's Education. That is a peculiarity of the South African situation where a monstrous system of socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural discrimination politicises everything in the highest possible degree. People's Education or Liberatory Education is a facet of the world-wide*

movement for the democratisation of education, a process which in other countries is often sponsored, or at least tolerated, by governments themselves.

In spite of the fact that even Dr Gerrit Viljoen (Minister of Education and Training) accepted that some aspects of People's Education deserved attention (*Natal Mercury*, 30 July 1986), the "threat" that People's Education offered to a large number of the bureaucrats and securocrats in the administration of the Department, as well as in the political spheres of the National Party, would result in a situation where they foresaw that their control over education would be challenged, and that negotiations regarding schooling and education would replace their "take it or leave it" style. Such a negotiating style required skills which did not form part of their own schooling and education. Their style often resulted in desperate "last resort behaviour" on the part of the Government.

Although People's Education existed in schools before the NECC was formed, it was from March 1986 that "crucial gains were achieved by crisis committees in over 200 centres countrywide" (*City Press*, 1 June, 1986). One of the reasons for this advance regarding People's Education, was that whole and united communities were working towards a common goal. It was also the intent of the NECC to implement People's Education through teachers of all "population groups" by involving democratic teacher organisations. Mr Ihron Rensburg, National Secretary of the NECC, stressed that People's Education was not intended for African schools only (*City Press*, 15 June 1986).

The gains reported and the intention of the NECC that People's Education would be introduced in most schools by 1 July 1986, with or without official approval, illicited strong reaction by the Government. A spokesperson of the Department of Education and Training (DET), still referred to by many as the Bantu Education Department, warned that this would result in a "war" with the Department (*Vaderland*, 6 May 1986). The need to control, even by force if necessary, would dominate action taken by the State to "resolve" the crisis for a few more years (compare *Weekly Mail*, 3 April 1986).

In April, already, AZAPO (Azanian People's Organisation) cautioned that legitimate public and overt opposition by organisations was nearing an end and that "wholesale repression reminiscent of the 60's was eminent" (*City Press*, 6 April 1986). When closing the schools did not help, further measures were introduced. On 14 July Mr Bill Staude, Director of DET in the Cape, announced that SRC's would be abolished and that communication with the "Crisis in Education Committee" would end (*Eastern Province Herald*, 14 July 1986). This announcement was made on the day the schools re-opened two weeks later than schedule, in order to enable the DET to finalise its measures of control (*Business Day*, 17 July 1986). It was during this period that Mr Zwelakhe Sisulu, Chairman of the NECC's People's Education Secretariat was detained (*New Nation*, 17 July 1986; *Sowetan*, 8 January 1987; Star, 6 January 1987). In January the following year, together with severe restrictions on the media, People's Education was banned by the Government – a clear indicaton that the State was not prepared to solve the education crisis in a democratic way (*Sowetan*, 15 January 1987).

A symbiotic relationship between People's Education and some emancipatory education projects at the University

In spite of a state of emergency declared by the South African Government in 1985 and renewed annually until 1990, restrictions on the NECC, other liberatory organisations, the media and mass protests, as well as the banning of People's Education, members in the Faculty of Education of the University of the Western Cape (UWC), in collaboration with the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU), organised a conference on People's Education late in 1987.

To be able to understand the relationship between People's Education and emancipatory action research as seen by some at the University, it is important to refer to the words of the first rector of the Institution more than thirty years ago, and compare that to the way in which the present rector, Prof Jakes Gerwel, views the role of the University. The former, Prof Meiring, saw UWC as:

> *... an institution of higher education that must be established for coloureds, a university which would provide a thorough academic training and inspire them with the ambition to serve their fellow men. The white guardian was obliged to provide these facilities for his coloured ward* (as quoted in Samuels, 1992:80).

Prof Jakes Gerwel, succeeding Prof Richard van der Ross, the first "black" rector, who lead the University away from its former "Bantu Education" mode towards a more liberal anti-apartheid position, adopted a radical perspective with his vision of the University as the "intellectual home of the Left" (Gerwel, 1987:2). Samuels (1992:81) mentions the following as features of this vision:

- The commitment from the institution as a whole to work towards the destruction of the apartheid social order and to contribute towards the formation of a non-racial, democratic South Africa.
- The identification and development of formal links with progressive political movements within the political community.
- The democratisation of the internal decision-making processes of the institution.
- The transformation of the curriculum.

It was in this spirit, then, that the Faculty of Education, under the leadership of Prof Owen van den Berg, introduced a structured masters course in Action Research and School Improvement in 1987. Although one might have disagreed with the concept of "school improvement" at a time when many South Africans were of the opinion that the entire political and social dispensation, including apartheid education, could not be "humanised" or "improved", but rather that it, in a revolutionary way, had to be transformed, the fact of the matter is that the course was introduced with the work of some prominent radical North American, European, British and Australian emancipatory educators in mind. Habermas, Grundy, Carr and Kemmis, Elliott, Eisner and Fullan, amongst many others, were included and continuously evaluated and critiqued in the light of political and educational developments in South Africa. From the beginning, and against the background of the thoughts of the mentioned authors, there was an understanding that we were engaged in an emancipatory form of strategic action to change the oppressive nature of the type of classroom practice so evident in the schools of the disenfranchised in South Africa. It has been upfront from the outset that the purpose of the research in which teachers would take part was aimed at the democratisation of their own education situations.

The course was planned to stretch over a period of two years comprising one year of coursework, to be followed by a mini-thesis. Apart from the nature of the problems addressed and the democratic approach to procedures followed during the first part of the course, the "transformative" character of the Master's in Action Research and School Improvement came to the fore specifically in the mini-thesis work, where the political motivations regarding *why* candidates wanted to change *what*, as well as for *how* they wanted to change things, had to be explained. This was, in addition to applicable educational, sociological and psychological reasons that they might have had for engaging in action to change a particular teaching and learning situation.

In 1989 the curriculum of the Master's course was extended to include a module in "radical pedagogy" which, together with action research's focus on the teacher as key figure to bring about change in the classroom and, hopefully, through that in more than the classroom situation only, accentuated the teacher's role as politician and "transformative intellectual" (Giroux, 1988:121-128). The Master's course stressed the view that it is not the so-called expert from outside that will transform practices of authoritarianism in schools, but rather the teacher as classroom practitioner. The idea of "transformative intellectual" points to a notion whereby the teacher is perceived as more than a technician who is to carry out the instructions of those in control of education, schools and classrooms. The teacher who acts and reflects on her practice as a transformative intellectual also takes part in *thinking* and *deciding* about the *why* and *what* for *which reasons* in the school and classroom.

The aims of People's Education as expressed by the delegates to the first education conference in 1985 are not only visible in the Master's programme offered by the University, they are also reflected in two subsequent projects established in the Department of Didactics by Owen van den Berg. The one on materials development and the other on action research, respectively co-ordinated by Maureen Robinson and Sue Davidoff. The link between politics and education in the programmes and an awareness of the necessity for empowering students for democratic participation in a torn and fragmented South African society was, and still is, evident.

After the unbanning of the NECC in 1990 much emphasis was, as in the past, placed on the crisis in education and the importance of the establishment of a single education department for all in the country. Towards the end of 1991, however, it was accepted that change in education could not come about on the education governance level only, but that the classroom politics of oppression on the one hand and liberation on the other, needed to be addressed. Many activist teachers were of the opinion that democratic rhetoric stemming from political platforms did not necessarily result in the transformation of the authoritarian classroom. Politically conscious teachers were, for example, often autocratic in their own classrooms. As a result of the recognition of the importance of democratic change in classroom and school situations, the National Executive Committee of the NECC resolved in the second half of 1991 to adopt two projects to further the organisation's aims regarding:

- The structural control over education on both a macro and a micro level. (The Education Governance Project resulted in a national conference held from 31 July to 2 August 1992.)
- The importance of bringing about change in the actual classroom situation. (The NECC's People's Education Project resulted in four regional conventions on People's Education and a National People's Education Convention in October 1992.)

Very important to note here is how close the People's Education Project of the NECC has moved to the action research projects associated with the Didactics Department of the University. A look at the aims of the People's Education conventions are also of interest in this effort to illuminate the relation between People's Education and the work done around emancipatory action research in the mentioned Department. Stated as some of the objectives for the conventions were:

- to put People's Education for People's Power back on the agenda of teachers, parents and students when they talk of educational change for a "new" South Africa;
- to redirect the focus of People's Education away from the street struggle for democracy in education to a democratic struggle in schools and classrooms; and
- to recognise the role of the teacher as transformative intellectual in the process of democratisation of the classroom without forgetting about the involvement of students and parents in the process.

Allow me a few comments regarding a possible conceptual shift within the NECC in relation to the role of the teacher before I proceed to answer the question on the connection between the aims and ideals as expressed since 1985 by NECC conferences and conventions and the emancipatory action research projects in the University's Department of Didactics.

While believing that the idea of assigning the same "worth" to all parties as human beings in the education sector must be supported and also defended at all times, I am of the opinion that the NECC as a mass based organisation consisting of teacher, student (on secondary and tertiary level), and university teacher organisations, did not make a clear enough distinction between the differences in roles to be played by the different sectors. In the process of democratisation all members (of the organisations) and the organisations as such were often viewed as having to have the "same say" in educational matters. The point I want to make is that democracy in education cannot work on the basis of a simplistic understanding allowing for a situation in which the majority (or winner) takes all.

There is no question about the valuable contribution students made to the liberation struggle through their participation in political action and decision-making and I am definitely not suggesting that the NECC was responsible for the collapse of a "culture of learning" ... this would let the apartheid regime (with its racist education policies) off the hook too easily. It is also acknowledged that the educational benefit of planning, leading, implementing and evaluating in real-life political organisation should not be underestimated. When one section (students) of a community, however, starts functioning in isolation of the other (parents, teachers, workers) it could jeopardise the potential of such a community to act in a united way against forces threatening its existence or standing in the way of freedom.

In many South African communities a situation has emerged where the crisis in education separated generations from one another partly because of an ill-conceived concept of participatory democracy, particularly as it relates to education in schools. A view which, in essence, ignores the difference between the roles of teachers and students, parents and their children in the education situation. There are examples where an acceptance of this version of an egalitarian dream by teachers resulted in many of them abdicating their responsibility regarding the education of "their" students. The reason for this being that: if it is accepted that the role of students is the same as that of teachers, *then* they also carry the same responsibility (also regarding their learning). Therefore: if *they* (the students) do not come to classes when *we* want to teach, it is not irresponsible for *us* (the teachers) to sit in the staffroom when *they* want to learn.

The NECC's recent conscious recognition of the teacher's role as educator and change agent in the democratisation of the teaching and learning situation, is crucial in the reconstruction of a "culture of learning". Democracy, however, also implies responsibility and accountability. And to reconstruct a "culture of learning" presupposes that teachers must accept responsibility for teaching and co-responsibility for the learning of the youth of the community to whom they are accountable. To put it differently, to ensure the united participation as critical co-learners in the education situation, the reconstruction of a "culture of learning (and teaching)" is essential - and it may very well be true that this will not come about without a more pertinent focus on the "culture of teaching" side.

In conclusion

Returning to the question referred to above, it seems clear that the political and educational goals of the NECC have had an impact on the projects and courses developed over the past few years in the Department of Didactics. But there are also substantial indications that some of the emancipatory education programmes, especially those that focus on the role of the teacher as change agent in her classroom, had an important effect on the NECC's People's Education Project. The focus on the teacher results from a view that teachers are able to not only reflect upon and bring about change in the situations in which they work, but also that they might be, because of their position as teacher, the most appropriate educational sector to "intervene" in oppressive schooling practices (compare the People's Education conventions' aims mentioned above). It goes without saying that integral to the role that the teacher plays as "transformative intellectual" (Giroux, 1988:121-128) in the democratising process, is the involvement of students and parents and the recognition of the unique roles that they have to play respectively.

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Chapter 3

People's Education, action research and disciplinary knowledge-making

Cyril Julie

Introduction

One of the main items on the People's Education agenda is the transformation of education. Mashamba describes this transformation as a

> *fundamental, qualitative change, whereby both black education for domestication and white education for domination will be superseded by a non-racial and democratic people's education for both national liberation and social emancipation* (1990:27).

This qualitative change is not only concerned with political emancipation, the belief held by the ruling class. The transformation was also concerned with intellectual emancipation. The resolution referring to "teaching practices which help people to be creative, to develop a critical mind and to analyze" adopted at the the Durban Conference addresses the issue of intellectual emancipation. Eric Molobi, the president of the NECC, further stressed this issue in his call for the "replacement of the rote learning methodology of Bantu Education with a methodology that develops an inquiring and critical mind" (*Frontline,* March 1987). This development of a critical and inquiring populace must not be viewed as the development of critical thinking skills propagated by critical thinking schools that were current in the mid nineteen eighties. The essence of the critical and inquiring attitude sought for by People's Education manifests itself in discussions about "content" and curricular products developed by various subject commissions of the NECC.

Who produces knowledge?

A central "content" issue that is addressed within People's Education is the construction of knowledge. McLaren, who holds a radical view on the construction of knowledge, writes as follows about knowledge as a social construction, when he says that the central concerns are:

> ... *how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others are clearly not. How certain types of knowledge legitimate certain gender, class, and racial interests. Whose interest does this knowledge serve? Who gets excluded as a result? Who is marginalized?* (1989:169).

A first issue coming to the fore regarding "alternative content" is the demystification of the origin, legitimacy-making procedures and creation of knowledge. Pierce (1989) considers this issue by considering People's English as a pedagogy of possibility and refers to the development of an "understanding of language as socially and historically constructed, but at the same time open to dispute". The Eurocentric bias of mathematics is discussed by Breen (1991) and Slammert (1991).

Accounts countering the dominant, mostly colonial, version of the generation of knowledge have a long tradition within educational circles of the oppressed in South Africa. Nearly forty years ago Kies (1993) addressed the question of knowledge production and challenged the myth that peoples outside of Europe made no or a minimal contribution towards world civilization. He argues that the suppression of the contribution of Non-European peoples, i.e. "peoples outside the Continent of Europe" (1953:9) forms part of a wider mechanism whereby

> *the privileged always rationalise their position by claiming inherent or divinely bestowed superiority ... and the despotic privilege invent[s] a myth – if not a mythology – by means of which it seeks to contain and, if possible bind afresh the unprivileged ... To this end, history, science, anthropology, religion – in fact, all aspects of activity and thought are recruited and conscripted into the service of the myth by*

> *which despotism hopes to fight off the embrace of the grave. With varying degrees of subtlety all human experience is re-interpreted or re-hashed to fit the requirements of the myth* (Kies, 1953:9).

The creation and development of knowledge is given considerable import in People's Education. Knowledge is viewed as created by people. It is not seen as "something out there"; waiting for the right moment and person through which it will be revealed. Knowledge production – in the sense that consideration is given to the social milieu which impacted upon the development of ideas; the social position of the producers of knowledge involved in the development of these ideas, their implicit aims, the way they justified their activities and their ways of communication – is deemed important to show how abstract concepts, ideas and reasoning had very concrete roots in practical, everyday problems of commercial and social value. The quest for the incorporation of the socio-historical development of knowledge in education is not to romanticise or glorify a particular society's contribution to the development of knowledge. Nor is it deemed appendaged activities to multiculturise curricula within which contributions from societies other than the dominant culture, are depicted as exotic and marginal. What is aimed at is the demystification of knowledge and the building of an awareness that knowledge is socially and historically constructed and open to dispute. Under certain economic, social and cultural conditions, it emerged and developed in certain directions. Under other conditions, it emerged and developed in different directions.

What type of knowledge?

Closely related to knowledge production is the question of different types of knowledge. People's Education is concerned with the development of a democratic society. As Soobrayan (1989:5) states People's Education aims "at overcoming the negative social values ... and instill in their place democratic values, collectivism and a wider social consciousness". Now it cannot be unproblematically accepted that all types of knowledge are conducive for the development of democratic competence.

Drawing on the work of Skovsmose (1990) three different types of knowledge can be delineated when thinking about the development of democratic competence. These are:

1. Domain-specific knowledge – the concepts, facts, ideas and the knowledge-generation mechanisms of the domain.
2. Pragmatic knowledge – knowing how and when to apply and use the artifacts of the domain.
3. Reflective knowledge – the interrogation of the assumptions underlying how knowledge is used, applied and legitimised in its particular way and the consideration of what the implications are if different assumptions are injected.

Apartheid education concerns itself with domain-specific knowledge. This knowledge type is also the thrust of many liberal compensatory education programmes which purport to work towards the eradication of the legacies of apartheid education. A major difference, however, between such programmes and the apartheid programme is that these programmes attempt to present domain-specific knowledge in a more palatable form.

Vocational and technical education proponents favour pragmatic knowledge. They claim that this knowledge type would best prepare students to fit into the world of work. Their claim is partly a response to the dissatisfaction expressed by business and industry that schools graduate students lacking the necessary skills and competencies required by business and industry.

Reflective knowledge concerns itself with more than knowing concepts, facts and having the skills and competencies to operate in the world of work. An aim of reflective knowledge is the identification of specific interests incorporated in the knowledge base installed to regulate the affairs of society. It is more than mere armchair thought. It includes the taking of action to change surrounding conditions, especially where such conditions reduce human possibilities.

The content that would best contribute towards a People's Education ideal of democracy is that which takes reflective knowledge as content seriously. Reflective knowledge is necessary for democratic competence. It is through this knowledge type that critical citizenship can be fostered.

What type of teaching and learning materials?

An issue closely related to that of content is the question of teaching and learning materials. Specifically in the light of the above narrative consideration needs to be given to which materials will best foster the development of reflective knowledge. Generally, two types are mentioned within this context (Skovsmose, 1990). These are:

- Open/divergent materials – proposed activities are such that the direction and content of learning are determined by the learners in conjunction with the teacher.
- Empowering/convergent materials – content determined by teachers with limited input from learners. This content deals with knowledge bases operative in regulating the societal affairs and the materials are fairly structured.

To get an indication of the differences between the two types of materials, activities based on a Telkom account can be considered. Activities from the open/divergent perspective will be of the form where much of the problems posed and the issues that will be engaged in, will be student-driven. They might come up with questions such as: How is the final amount determined? What is the unit charge? . From the empowering/convergent perspective a more structured approach would be followed. Specific questions for students to consider will be given. These will include questions of the form: Why is the charge for a telephone call based on units and not on, say, seconds? It is not to say that this latter type of question will not be asked by students working with open/divergent materials. What is made sure of with empowering/convergent materials is that the type of issue is indeed addressed.

People's Education, due to its democratic competence aim, would favour empowering/convergent materials since such materials constitute a basis for reflective knowledge. On the other hand, open/divergent materials leave space for a more democratic classroom practice. It thus appears that with respect to teaching and learning materials that there seemingly is a contradiction between the social rationale, best realised through empowering/convergent materials and the pedagogic rationale, best realised through open/divergent materials, for democracy.

Conclusion

As other contributions in this collection illustrate, emancipatory action research as it currently manifests itself through projects at the University of the Western Cape places a high premium on process. This concern has much to do with getting participants to reflect on their actions and through this strive to improve their practice. In this sense it can be said that it is concerned with teacher behaviour. Some action research initiatives elsewhere regard disciplinary knowledge-making activity as emancipatory as teacher behaviour. For example, Lampert (1990) describes an action research study in which the attempt is to engage learners in mathematical knowledge-making as an authentic activity as practised by the community of mathematicians.

The above narrative on content in People's Education is an attempt to draw emancipatory action researchers' attention to disciplinary knowledge-making activity. In so doing the intention is not that the emancipatory action research project should test itself whether it is moving in line with the concerns of "content" in People's Education. Rather, the intention is to provide some sounding board for the project for the furtherance of its research agenda.

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Chapter 4

Advancing emancipatory practices in art education

Sandra Kriel

My understanding of action research

Action research is a form of educational research in which the participants engage in a critical process of deconstructing the values, assumptions and interests underlying social practice to uncover different understandings of reality and existing power relations. The process is not "objective", "value-free" or "neutral" and the aim is not for an "expert" to construct theories which others have to implement. It could rather be described as praxis in which there is a reflexive and dialectical relationship between reflection and action, and where emancipation and transformation are made possible through such interaction.

It is important for the participants in action research to develop equal power relations and interpersonal trust, in order to risk rendering themselves vulnerable while eroding securities by penetrating the surface of educational interaction. Enlightenment comes through problematising and developing profound understandings of existing relations and conditions, and emancipation comes through the commitment to the struggle to transform unjust relations and conditions.

How can my project be said to have advanced (if at all) the practices of emancipatory action research?

My action research project was informed by Jürgen Habermas' theory of knowledge-constitutive interests in which he postulates three anthropologically deep-seated interests that inform our search for knowledge. These interests are the technical, the practical and the emancipatory.

In collaboration with a group of first year art students at Bellville College of Education, I attempted to uncover the values, assumptions and interests underlying our interaction and to transform these to make them more empowering and emancipatory. The project went through three stages, each of which was informed by a different interest.

In the first stage, which was the first time I met a first year group of students, I asked them to make a drawing which would describe their idea of what art was. From the drawings it became clear that most students had developed the idea that art reproduced visual reality and that only technical skills were needed to be able to produce such a reproduction. This stage could be described as involving a technical interest because it was based on positivist assumptions of reductionism, duality and linearity. Art was understood as being "value-free", objectively describing and reflecting visual reality. It was believed that theory and skills could be applied to achieve a predetermined product.

During the second stage of the project the positivist paradigm of perception was replaced by the assumption that our relationship to others and the world is mediated by language which needs to be interpreted in a socio-political and historical context. I asked the students to forget about "art" and to fearlessly make a drawing of any personal experience placed within the South African context. The drawing had to communicate their interpretation and understanding of the event. The assumption in this project was that art does not only have a descriptive role but that it can produce and reproduce subjective understandings of the networks of meanings and social rules involved in experienced reality.

Finally, the third stage evolved within a critical framework with an emancipatory interest. The first two stages were easy and I later viewed them as a form of resource development in which information was gained about the students and their ideas about art and art education. The third stage was an insecure and frightening attempt to unravel the fibre of classroom practice to emancipate ourselves from its constraints. We needed a lot of courage to risk moving into unknown territory and engage in open-ended practices. From the very start our action illuminated and allowed us to deal with one problem after the other. Instead of limiting our interaction to authoritarian transmission of predetermined packages of knowledge, we problematized *what* we were supposed to learn and *how* we went about learning it.

Although I had attempted previously to deal with social issues in art classes, these attempts were mostly intuitively structured and not critically analysed and understood. We then had to develop an understanding of the social consequences and implications of our activities; whether our communication through art was emancipatory or whether it was distorted and used as another mechanism which we impose on ourselves and others to contribute to our own oppression and that of others.

The first problem developed around how to collaboratively decide what to do in the third stage of the project. I made my first mistake by unilaterally deciding that we would start the project by looking critically at aspects of our society which frustrate individuals and constrain them to sustain dependence, inequality and oppression. This decision was informed by the belief that becoming aware of problems is the beginning of emancipatory processes. Some students very soon showed resistance to the notion that art could play a social role by exposing unjust relations and conditions. This resistance stimulated interesting debates addressing issues such as art being purely aesthetic; social commitment; and "accountable" forms of art. The third stage should probably have started with and developed from this debate.

Through a proces of enlightenment we hoped to uncover the power relations and the historic, social and material conditions underlying the problems we were experiencing. Here, the process of making art is seen as a form of communicative action which can be empowering, emancipatory and transformative.

The extent to which my understanding of critical theory informed the project and contributed to emancipatory practice

Habermas, whose theory of knowledge-constitutive interests informed my action research project, attempted to supply an adequate model of critical theory with practical intentions incorporating an emancipatory interest. The basis of this interest and of my project lies in the belief in the human capacity to develop self-understanding, to act rationally with greater consciousness and autonomy, to be self-determining and reflectively involved in constructing history wilfully, consciously and responsibly. Without a belief in these basic human capacities and mutual trust emancipatory practices will not be possible.

Critical theory aims at deconstructing the presuppositions and the norms and values underlying social practice, in order to uncover different understandings of reality and existing power relations. In the project, the participants needed to become aware of and deactivate mechanisms of defense and distortion to be able to honestly question and uncover their understandings. When we spent time deconstructing arguments about "purely" aesthetic and socially involved art, it became clear that our ideas about art are often formed by the mechanisms of the state to maintain the dominant ideology and power relations. During these debates I also realized that meanings were constructed in all forms of art and not only in socially involved art as I had previously thought. The question is not whether "purely" aesthetic or socially involved art has meaning, but whether creative agents understand why they do what they do and what the social consequences are of what and how they do it. For art to be transformative decisions have to be taken reflexively from a socio-historical perspective and they should be rational and accountable.

For Habermas an emancipatory interest empowers people and secures freedom from self-imposed and structural constraints through the critical analysis and transformation of asymmetrical power relations. Through our attempt to develop critical capacities (enlightenment – looking at those aspects in our society which frustrate and constrain us) and our commitment to action (transformation – trying to find solutions to such problems) we were empowered to start knocking at the wall of confinement.

Habermas suggests that social action must be grasped reflectively from the perspective of the acting subject. Because this perspective is not observable, it has to be understood. For him understanding can only be achieved through meaningful communication. The presuppositions and conditions of communication have to be examined rationally if one is to gain a better understanding of social interaction.

Holub (1991:8) describes communicative action as "rational discourse that is free from both domination and linguistic pathology, and oriented towards intersubjective understanding and consensus". Habermas (1971:2) describes communicative action as symbolic interaction which is governed by binding consensual norms which "define reciprocal expectations about behavior and which must be understood and recognized by at least two acting subjects". Rational consensus occurs when sanctions enforce social norms and when intersubjective agreement within a free and equal conversation is important, rather than agreement with "facts".

In this project students had to work in groups, develop resources together and construct a rational drawing, communicating the consensus reached through communicative action. Time was often spent critically discussing issues and ideas with the hope of developing an understanding of the multitude of meanings being constructed. Although we tried to deconstruct presuppositions and conditions of communication we often did it rather superficially because we were not yet empowered enough to articulate our penetrations below the surface; we were often not skilled enough in the art of rational discourse, and relations were not always equal. Power struggles sometimes developed in the groups and participants who viewed themselves as being more skilled in translating ideas into visible form often dominated the process. We had to deal with uncompromising and authoritarian attitudes while "life" skills were developed in the process.

For us to have been able to develop deep intersubjective understanding we should have gone through processes of bringing about an agreement on the presupposed basis of validity claims that could be mutually recognized. For Habermas these validity claims are comprehensibility, truth, rightness/correctness and truthfulness/sincerity. We unfortunately never reached a stage where we discussed validity claims or where we consciously measured our statements against validity claims. I assume that it was accepted in our discussions that participants tried to make comprehensible, true, correct and sincere statements. When intersubjective understanding could not be reached it was possible that utterances were not valid in terms of the validity claims.

Habermas presupposed concepts like truth, freedom and justice in an "ideal speech situation" which requires equality and freedom from inner and outer constraints for all participants. Habermas' model of interests rests upon the conviction that all authentic human discourse aims at a regulative ideal of universal, unrestricted communication between completely free and equal human agents and that ideology, understood as the systematic deformation of communication by the covert operations of force, represents the betrayal of such an ideal (see Kearney, 1987:223). In the limited time we were involved in this project we did not reach the ideal of universal, unrestricted communication between completely free and equal human agents. Some of the constraints in this regard were verbal and visual communicative incompetence, ideology, previous experiences of autocratic unequal power relations, reification of certain forms of knowledge, coercion, and fear of failing.

To develop an understanding of social interaction, Winter suggests processes of reflexive and dialectical critique. Reflexive critique is explained by Winter (1989:41) as a process in which judgments in communication are "bent back into the speaker's subjective system of meanings" to discover own interpretations, assumptions and concerns. Habermas (1972:197) refers to the emancipatory power of reflection "which the subject experiences in itself to the extent that it becomes transparent to itself in the history of its genesis". Just as the individual rationalises unacceptable unconscious desires, so too "ideology serves, at the broader level of social interaction, to "rationalise" the power-ploys of domination by retrospectively rearranging and justifying its motivations (Kearney, 1987:228). In this project we became more aware of such distortions of communication and we realised how important it was to develop ways of looking through layers and layers of meaning to discover where it came from and what implications it has. The participants could develop a clearer understanding of who they were, how they became who they were, whether they were what they wanted to be, and what they could do to become who they wanted to be.

The project was based on the assumption that if people can realise that their world picture was acquired under conditions of coercion and that it is reflectively unacceptable to them, they can acknowledge that it is false and emancipate themselves from conditions of deprivation, frustration, constraint, and the social stuctures that support such barriers. We accepted that human agency is socially constructed, humanly determined and interpreted, and hence subject to change through human means. It is the task of critical theory and a critical approach to art education to reveal the sources of human suffering in social institutions which falsely lay claim to legitimacy, and to transform them. We hoped that the processes the participants went through in a protected environment on a micro level would be extended into their lived reality to contribute to transformation on a macro level.

We also tried to develop an understanding of the processes of enlightenment and emancipation which Geuss (1981:58) describes as a change from one state to another. The initial state is one of false consciousness which is inherently connected to an unfree existence of bondage, delusion and frustration. This unfree existence is a form of self-imposed coercion of which the person is not aware. False consciousness is a kind of self-delusion: "the desired state is one in which the agents are free of false consciousness – they have been enlightened – and free of self-imposed coercion – they have been emancipated". Ewert argues that educators who have distorted self and social views inhibit their own development and that of others. They also maintain repressive social systems "such as schools, that prevent a person from developing his or her full capacity for freedom and autonomy" (1991:355).

It is crucial that participants are well prepared for this change from one state to another because it can create feelings of insecurity and anxiety. Rudduck (1984:62) believes that participants should understand what innovation implies for interpersonal relationships and that they should understand the view of knowledge that the innovation endorses. He also argues that "negotiation of new meanings, or shared meanings, is at the heart of the process of innovation" (1984:65).

I asked students to undertake research and develop resources to become more enlightened about the problem they chose with its underlying conditions and possible solutions to the problem. I also thought this would help them to become aware of the possible existence of a false consciousness. Very few students had the desire to do research and argued that they preferred using their lived experiences. I realised that doing research, finding "objective" statistics and reports of other people's experience (my positivist conditioning) does not guarantee freeing oneself from false consciousness and that a better understanding can be gained by deconstructing one's own lived experiences. The lack of commitment to do research could also have been related to my unilateral and autocratic decision to develop the project around personal and social problems. The problems so created gave me an opportunity to become aware of and question my own false consciousness. Perhaps thinking about purely aesthetic and socially involved art should have been stimulated, after which we collaboratively could have made a decision about the area to be dealt with in this project. But my decision was informed by my belief that reality is not only reproduced but also produced through the art making process and that we either maintain or resist power relations through our creatioons.

Dialectical critique opens up questions about internal and external relationships in and between phenomena. Winter (1989:46) believes that the contradiction between unity and diversity inherent in all phenomena effects continuous change. The tension between being one and being diverse at the same time creates instability . The multiplicity of relations in and between phenomena and society are in perpetual change, with the consequence that the meanings people construct cannot be one-dimensional, universal and permanent. Interpersonal trust and support helped some of the participants to let go of their defences and risk getting involved in this insecure changing reality to discover some of the unlimited internal and external relationships in and between phenomena, and in and between themselves, others and society.

In exposing the tensions, conflicts and contradictions in our society through reflexive and dialectical critique, rational critique could have formed a basis for processes of self and social transformation. We realised that critique can only take place collaboratively through rational discourse where rationality does not exclude practical questions of values, norms, interests and commitments. We also realised that our constructed meanings and understandings could only be validated by the profundity of self and social transformation. The collaborative process of making the drawing was one way of attempting transformation. The next commitment would have been to live the meanings constructed in the world outside the classroom.

Habermas posits that rationalisation of society could be measured by changes in three dimensions (1971:119). By a decreasing degree of repressiveness (which at the level of personality structure should increase average tolerance of ambivalence in the face of role conflicts), a decreasing degree of rigidity (which should multiply the chances of an individually stable self-presentation in everyday interactions), and approximation to a type of behavioral control that would allow role distance and the flexible application of norms that, while well-internalized, would be accessible to reflection. In the project we experienced slight changes in all these three dimensions, but much more time and hard work were needed for true rationalisation of our interaction.

In conclusion

When our interaction was honest, tolerant and critical, participants rendered themselves vulnerable and placed their practices and viewpoints at risk by engaging in the threatening world of reflexivity and dialectics transcending the position of comfortable and unquestioning security. The process demanded trust and considerations of ethics and prudence to ensure the psychic comfort of everyone concerned, and to reduce the possibility of undesired consequences.

Instead of an objective, disinterested perspective on society, a personal vantage point placed a greater responsibility on the individual to develop disciplined and rationally accountable social practice. Accountability was not to outside "experts" but to the human beings collaborating in the educational process and to their community and society. This accountability required rigorous and systematic processes of interaction informed by an understanding of the intrinsic qualities of the practices themselves, of democratic processes and of the desired role of the school and each individual in society. We attempted as McLaren (1989:171) puts it "to create the conditions under which irrationality, domination and oppression can be overcome and transformed through deliberative, collective action".

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Chapter 5

What kind of knowing is socially critical action research?

Cassiem Savahl

This paper takes as its focus my attempts to use socially critical action research to promote more critical and reflective teaching in pre-service teacher education at a House of Representatives ("Coloured affairs") college of education.

The first section is a brief subjective account of events from the moment I entered teaching to where I presently find myself.

Secondly I trace my understanding of the ethics of action research from the initial planning and implementation of a project at the College.

Crossing the Rubicon: From commerce to education

I entered the teaching profession at the beginning of the 1980s after many years in commerce. This move was, psychologically speaking, not a smooth transition at all. At the school where I started my teaching career, the teachers were expert brokers of information and vigorously exercised their specialised skill of teaching the syllabus content. With few exceptions they occupied an unquestioned position between the state and the children of the oppressed. I had faced many problems in the private seçtor, but they were different to and far less vexing than the ones which confronted me now. My dilemmas were, to what extent to develop critical thought; to what extent to revise syllabus content, and to what extent to focus on getting children to pass the final examination. Later I was to discover that in one form or another these dilemmas are embedded in every decision taken about teaching in a school.

At the end of 1988 I was seconded to the College referred to above and also at the same time learnt that I had been accepted into the M.Ed. school improvement and action research programme.

I was particularly excited with the secondment since I had never been taught how to teach in a formal way and I was sure that a college involved in teacher education would have much to offer me as far as classroom practice was concerned.

While doing the B.Ed. at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) I came in contact, for the first time, with the writings of (amongst others) Althusser, Freire, Illich, Gramsci, Fay, Bowles and Gintis. This was a far cry from the Landmans, Killians, Gunters, Van Rensburgs, Van Zyls and other disciples of Fundamental Pedagogics whose work underpins the Higher Education Diploma (HED) course at the University of South Africa (UNISA). A course which had initially provided me with a classroom modus operandi.

This course had taught me the technical aspects of teaching – how to lead the child to responsible adulthood – wherever that may be. It was this Fundamental Pedagogics mind-set which formed the philosophical basis of my teaching up until the time I registered for the B.Ed. course at "the intellectual home of the left".

It was this course which I feel imbued me with Freire's ideals of a liberating educator. No longer was I now preoccupied with pushing, kicking and shoving the child to responsible adulthood. My concerns now were, inter alia: How do I democratise my classroom? How do I escape the tyranny of the textbooks? What must I do to make my lessons meaningful learning experiences for students and myself? How do I evaluate to make tests and examinations a less traumatic experience for the students? I was convinced that at the College of Education I would learn how to teach in a radical way. I was to learn later that I was highly mistaken, since the Institution was enmeshed in the notion of Fundamental Pedagogics – very much still an "own affairs" institution and completely "out of step" with what was happening in the Faculty of Education at UWC.

Teacher education and the "engineering assumption"

Much of what has happened in colleges of education is based on a technicist view of learning. Therefore student teachers are schooled in what is called the "basic didactic principles". These include the principles of planning, evaluation, motivation, socialisation and differentiation. It is claimed that through the successful application and manipulation of these "basic principles", effective learning will occur. The tacit assumption seems to be that these principles are "scientific" techniques; they are interest-free and can be applied to "engineer" learning or in fact any problem a teacher may face in the classroom. Teaching is perceived as a technical problem, that only necessitates instrumental strategies and information produced by educational experts in prescribed textbooks. Since teacher education is rooted in the positivistic paradigm, it is no wonder that aspirant teachers see colleges of education as institutions where they can go to in order to obtain the best recipe for a successful teaching career. Nowhere is this "recipe" notion more evident than in the evaluation of student teachers during practice teaching. Lecturers evaluate student teachers on, inter alia: appearance, tone of voice, lesson design, use of teaching aids, question techniques and teaching style. This nomological conception of learning flies in the face of a radical pedagogy.

M.Ed. action research programme

As far as my acceptance into the M.Ed. action research programme was concerned, I experienced extreme ambivalence. I was excited about the prospects of doing the course but, on the other hand I was fearful of the new learning situation I was to find myself in – face to face with intellectuals, academics, experts, the "ghurus" from UWC. The course commenced in January 1989 with a weekend seminar at Bloublommetjies (a farm in the Wellington district).

Socially critical action research: Critical pedagogic action on the part of educators

During my two years' stay at the College I tried to move away from instrumental teaching towards a more radical pedagogical approach. I realised that good intentions were not enough and turned to socially critical action research to initiate and sustain my endeavours to transform my teaching practice. The case study I will present later is an example of one of my attempts to break out from the "seedy" world of instrumental teaching.The term "action research" has been devalued by being used as a catchall label for any kind of project where the emphasis is upon classroom practice and follows a cycle consisting of moments of reflecting and replanning.

This form of problem solving research, Carr and Kemmis disdainfully refers to as an " ... arrested action research" (1986:185), research which neglects moral and ethical issues. While inquiry of this nature may not in itself be cause for concern, it does however, become highly problematic when there is a failure to connect the specific foci of research to broader social contexts and current political issues.

Action research in education is being undertaken with a multiplicity of intentions yielding different forms of insights as well as different kinds of knowledge. It is for this reason that I would argue that we have reached the stage where a critical analysis of the differences among the forms of action research is crucial.

Carr and Kemmis's (1986) distinction between research for education about education is underpinned by Habermas's knowledge constitutive interests. Habermas theorises that knowledge is produced by the ways people orientate themselves to the world. He posits three basic orientations, each of which is governed by a particular interest (Carson, 1990:168). These interests, the technical, practical and emancipatory, each informs action research resulting in forms of action research relating to education in different ways.

The fundamental difference between action research informed by a technical interest and action research informed by a practical one, is that the former is concerned primarily with answering the questions: What must I do to get the best results and how do I do it? The latter also asks, What must I do in order to understand what is happening in this social context?

Unlike the technical and practical kinds of action research, emancipatory action research does not accept an oppressive situation. It wants to transform society by, for instance, making it more "egalitarian". A typical question would therefore be: How can I contribute to the emancipation of the oppressed? Hence, the idea of socially critical research which goes beyond effective teaching methods and effective classroom management.

In South Africa, action research needs to develop its own distinctive characteristics, ideally research which has the potential to turn the attention of teachers to the constraints under which they work and to the broader social effects of that work. Socially critical action research informed by an emancipatory interest appears to fit the bill. Tripp (1990:161) defines socially critical action research in education as being, " strategic critical pedagogic action on the part of the classroom teachers, aimed at increasing social justice". In practical terms, it is not simply a matter of challenging the system, but of seeking to understand what makes the system the way it is, and challenging that, while remaining conscious that one's own sense of justice and equality is itself open to question. In short, it goes beyond effective teaching methods and efficient management.

My use of socially critical action research at the College emanates from, firstly, a strong conviction that, with all its pitfalls and constraints, action research can provide us with a lever to "unpack" the complexities of thinking about education and be used as a strategy for the transformation of teaching practice. Secondly, I also consider it to be a research paradigm which could be useful in developing long-term habits and frameworks for teacher activism and reflective critical pedagogy. Finally, I hoped that the democratic epistemology of socially critical action research would bring the students I was involved with to the realisation that they can also be producers of knowledge. I would now like to report on a small-scale case study I was involved in at the College of Education in 1989.

Protest, conflict and action research

Since 1976 schooling for the children of the disenfranchised has been in a state of flux in South Africa. There have been numerous instances of stayaways, class boycotts and student campaigns challenging the hegemonic status of the state as well as its collusion with capital to further develop and entrench racist capitalism. In the following few pages, I endeavour to show how the notion of socially critical action research was used as a framework in an attempt to reduce tensions and heal a breach in student relations in a post boycott period at the College.

Another bend in the road

This report consist of three parts:

(a) Preamble – a brief overview of the decision of the Department of Education and Culture (coloured affairs) in the house of Representatives to close Zonnebloem Training College.

(b) Boycott – the decision taken by the Western Province Tertiary Student Representative Councils (WPTSRC's) to boycott their academic programmes.

(c) Discussions – the organising of group discussions amongst first and second year students at the College where I accepted a post as lecturer.

Preamble

In 1989 the House of Representatives' decision to close Zonnebloem Training College in "District Six" became final. Some of the reasons for this were, as they stated, that the need for primary school teachers had been fulfilled and that they were not going to train teachers for unemployment. Apart from this there had also been a dramatic decline in the number of applications for enrolment at colleges under the control of the Department. All present lecturing staff and students were to be transferred to Bellville College of Education in Kuils River.

Boycott action

College students felt that there was "a political colour to this closure", the hidden agenda being to remove the last few black spots from District Six. They called for the upgrading of the college or, alternatively, the building of a new Zonnebloem College in District Six. In support of their stand the WPTSRC's decided to boycott college academic programmes.

Initially, students at the College where I taught voted against the boycott proposal, but their motion was defeated at WPTSRC level. After a week of further deliberation, the students decided to reverse their original decision and to support the boycott call. The status of some "majority" decisions in student politics was unclear at the time and tended to be a contentious issue. In a recent paper, O'Connell and Engelbrecht (1989:5) make the point that it was

> *ard to access the extent to which the democratic process works itself through to bodies of wider representation until a decision reflecting the general student will is arrived at. There are examples, notably at WPTSRC level, where voting by mandate led to concerted regional action even by those campuses which had voted against this action.*

During the boycott period alternative programmes were arranged at the College, which also included a placard demonstration in Jan Smuts Drive in Athlone. In the meantime student numbers at the College dwindled drastically as many became disillusioned with the boycott situation. Eventually, many third year students (in their final year at college) lobbied support and wrote a letter to the Rector requesting the immediate resumption of the lecture programme. The Rector was not prepared to accede to this request unless it came from the general student body. Things eventually came to a head on 24 July 1989, when WPTSRC's took a decision not to go out on practice teaching. Letters to this effect were sent to all schools involved in the practice teaching programme.

On Monday 31 July 1989 (the start of practice teaching) at a mass meeting in the college hall, the senior vice-rector called on students to honour their obligation to the schools with regard to practice teaching. This, he stated, was an official examination requirement (not negotiable), which, if not fulfilled, would result in failing the final examination. Subsequently, students at our College took a decision to present themselves at schools on Tuesday 1 August to observe, and to start practice teaching on Wednesday 2 August. Principals at schools acceded to this request.

Discussions

On returning from practice teaching (14 August) I, along with the first and second year students, decided to spend some time reflecting on the events of the past few weeks. Two 80-minute group discussion sessions were held. Students were unanimous in their decision to support Zonnebloem. "They are our brothers and sisters in the struggle, we must support them", was a comment supported by most. However, with regards to the boycott action, the students were deeply divided and many heated arguments ensued.

Those in favour of the boycott claimed that "struggling students" had no other on-the-ground strategy readily available to them. Others, however, felt that there was no meaningful discussion on possible "alternative actions" and that when they voted to boycott, they were not aware of the fact that it was going to be for an indefinite period. Many students felt that we should withdraw from the WPTSRC's because of the undemocratic manner in which decisions were often taken.

While the insistence on participatory democracy, with its emphasis on majority decisions, is consistent with the aims of People's Education as articulated by the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC), there are rather perplexing contradictions and inconsistencies which need to be understood and clarified if education for transformation is to proceed coherently (O'Connell and Engelbrecht, 1989:5). During these group discussions three groups with different opinions became apparent:

(a) Those who were totally against the boycott.

(b) Students who initially supported the boycott but now viewed it rather negatively because, as they claimed, it was uncoordinated and lacked direction.

(c) Those who fully supported the boycott and viewed it positively. They felt that the students should not take things lying down but that they should engage the State at every possible opportunity. The boycott, according to them, had widely publicised the unjust closure of Zonnebloem. Apart from this, through the boycott many students had received their "political baptism".

Many significant views were expressed by the students, one in particular impressing me:

> *The biggest problem I now see with the boycott was, that we did not sit down and do what we are doing now. If we had done it then, a lot of internal conflict and ill feelings could have been avoided. Amongst*

> *the sloganizing and chanting we rarely hear students expressing alternative views. There tends to be a complete breakdown in communication.*

For me this brought to mind what Paulo Freire (1989:81) has to say about dialogue, that it cannot exist unless it involves critical thinking, thinking which sees reality as a process, in transformation, thinking which does not separate itself from action but constantly involves itself in the real struggle without fear of the risks involved.

What I found of particular importance in these discussions, was that no student claimed neutrality on the subject, each and everyone had his/her opinion, and the fact that these were conflicting was of no importance. During the boycott most of the students were mute. It would appear that these group discussions had broken this "culture of silence". Many students felt that they had gained a sense of self-confidence. They were made to feel that, no matter what they think, it was also of importance.

These are some of the students' comments:

- I have been wanting to get this off my chest for quite a while ... everybody listened.
- I am scared to stand up and talk in mass meetings, now I have been allowed to express my feelings, I feel better now.
- I was totally against this boycott thing. I'm not so sure now ... can you believe it, I did not even know such a place as Zonnebloem even existed.
- Did I just make my maiden political speech?

I was of the opinion that we had a basis for conscientisation in these discussions. The students appeared to be critically aware of the socio-political context of education and they had been stimulated to find solutions. It was Samora Machel who once said:

> *What we learn we do, and when we do, we see what is wrong. So we learn from our mistakes and achievements. The mistakes show where there are shortcomings in our knowledge, weak points which have to be eliminated. This means that it is in the process of producing that we correct our mistakes* (Hope and Timmel, 1982:116).

Also involved in these discussions were students serving on the SRC at the College. These are some of the comments they made after the discussions.

- I am still not convinced that the decision to boycott was wrong ... but I did not realise people had such strong feelings about it.
- There are some students who we labelled reactionary, we wanted to ... they have a good case you know.
- We were very hostile towards them, I feel guilty ... they don't have the moron mentality that I thought they have.
- What happened here today really opened my eyes ... we should have talked during the boycott. (Excerpts taken from field notes).

This is what socially critical action research is all about:

> *the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it. It aims to feed practical judgement in concrete situations, and the validity of theories it generates depends not so much on scientific tests of truth, as on their usefulness in helping people to act intelligently and skillfully* (Elliott, 1989:9).

Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to make the claim that socially critical action research changed my perceptions of education and influenced, initiated and sustained a process of transformation of my teaching practice. If I am now accused of being very positivistic, in setting up a technical relationship between socially critical action research and my personal transformation, then I would reply – consider the idea of a quasi-causal relationship and think about conditions which *warrant* in contrast to conditions which *cause* – but that is a story for another time.

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Chapter 6

Aksienavorsing en die verandering van klaskamerpraktyk: 'n Gevallestudie

Trevor van Louw

Die oproep om transformasie rakende die demokratisering van die samelewing in Suid-Afrika het die afgelope paar jaar meer as ooit tevore opgegaan. Dié enorme stryd sou noodwendig ook die onderwys nie onaangeraak laat nie. As onderwyser en as polities-vernalatigde Suid-Afrikaner, het ook ek veral sedert 1980, 'n jaar gekenmerk deur studenteprotes, tot die besef gekom dat onderwysers en studente ook 'n rol te speel het in dié stryd.

Die demokratiese retoriek wat ons as onderwysers buite ons klaskamers gebruik het, het egter nie gestrook met ons outoritêre optrede daarbinne nie. Dit is egter nie vreemd nie. Ook Melanie Walker (1988:150) is van mening dat hierdie verskynsel toegeskryf kan word aan die feit dat onderwysers onderwys gee soos daar aan hulle onderwys gegee is en dat formele onderwysopleiding niks of weinig bydra tot die wyse waarop onderwysers onderwys gee nie.

Die kurrikulum soos vergestalt in ons klaskamers was – en is na my mening nog steeds – dan ook sprekend van 'n outoritêre opset waarbinne onderwysers hulle alleen die reg toeëien om oor die verloop van die proses in die klaskamer te besluit, dit te beplan en te implementeer. Die rol van leerlinge word in so 'n klaskamer gereduseer tot dié van passiewe toehoorders. Sodanige opset kan myns insiens min of selfs dalk geen geleentheid bied vir die ontwikkeling van daardie vermoëns wat noodsaaklik is vir 'n lewe in 'n demokratiese samelewing nie. Só 'n klaskamer moet noodwendig vir onderwysers wat 'n demokratiese toekomstige Suid-Afrika visualiseer, verwerplik wees want, as ons strewe 'n strewe vir 'n demokratiese Suid-Afrika is, sal ook die wyse waarop ons die jeug in die kultuur inlei, demokraties moet wees. In terme van die kurrikulum sou dit impliseer dat beide inhoud en vorm 'n demokratiese karakter moet openbaar. Wood (1988:184) laat hom soos volg oor hierdie proses uit:

> *In content we provide students with the tools to live a democratic life and the visions of what is possible in our shared social context. In terms of form the curriculum should engage students in actual decision-making in a shared community of equality and justice.*

Skole, en daarom ook klaskamers, sou dus nie los gesien kan word van die strewe na demokrasie nie. Die skool as opvoedkundige instansie sou daarom juis moet beantwoord aan die sentrale doel, naamlik die ontwikkeling van demokratiese agente (Morrow, 1989:149). Dit sou beteken dat skole getransformeer sal moet word vanaf verlengstukke van die arbeidsmark en instellings vir die reproduksie van die apartheidsisteem tot

> *... democratic sites dedicated to forms of self and social empowerment ... where students learn the knowledge and skills necessary to live in an authentic democracy* (Giroux, 1988b:xxxii).

In refleksie op my eie onderwyspraktyk het ek besef dat ook my klaskamer sou moes verander, veral vanweë die tweespalt tussen dit waarin ek polities glo en dit wat ek as onderwyser in my klaskamer uitleef. Hierdie verandering sou sodanig moes wees dat 'n bydrae gelewer kan word tot mense se outonomie, se vermoë tot kritiese denke en tot die ontwikkeling van 'n morele en politieke bewussyn gerig op 'n stryd om demokrasie en terselfdertyd teen alle vorme van verdrukking (Morrow, 1989:149).

Die proses in my klaskamer sou gewysig moes word om studente toe te rus om as aktiewe deelgenote hul plek in die samelewing in te neem, want die gevaar bestaan dat as onderwysers hierdie saak nie met die nodige erns bejeën nie ... *democratic institutions might remain empty of significance or content through a lack of democratic agents* (Morrow, 1989:149).

In my soeke na metodes om ook die gebeure in my klaskamer in diens te stel van 'n demokratiese Suid-Afrika, het ek kennis geneem van 'n M.Ed.-kursus in aksienavorsing wat deur die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland aangebied word. Tydens gesprekvoering met studente wat op daardie stadium besig was met genoemde kursus, is my belangstelling veral geprikkel deur die feit dat dit gerig is op onderwys vir 'n demokratiese Suid-Afrika, iets waarmee ek myself kon assosieer.

In my omgang met die literatuur, en as gevolg van my deelname aan gesprekke met medestudente en kursusleiers, het ek toenemend daarvan oortuig geraak dat die transformasie van my praktyk deur middel van 'n aksienavorsingsprojek aangespreek kan word.

Aksienavorsing, as 'n inherent demokratiese vorm van navorsing, aldus Grundy (1987:142), leen sigself in wese spesifiek tot die aanspreek van die probleem wat ek in my klaskamer geïdentifiseer het.

Die aksienavorsingsprojek is uiteindelik in April 1989 in my klaskamer geloods. Aanvanklik is veral gekonsentreer op aktiwiteite wat leerlingdeelname sou vergroot (o.a. groepwerk, lesaanbieding in die klaskamer deur die leerlinge self en evaluering van aanbiedinge deur mede-leerlinge). Die projek wat uit twee aksienavorsingsiklusse van beplanning, observasie, aksie en refleksie bestaan het, het uiteindelik in September ten einde geloop. Weens beperkte ruimte kan die projek nie hier in detail bespreek word nie. Die vraag wat wel met reg afgevra kan word, is of verandering soos gevisualiseer wel plaasgevind het. Is daar inderdaad wegbeweeg van 'n outoritêre klaskameropset na 'n opset waarbinne studente 'n idee kan kry van 'n lewe in 'n demokratiese samelewing? Studente het op hierdie vraag gereageer deur aan te voer dat hul deelname aan die projek veel tot hul selfvertoue bygedra het. Die meeste studente wou juis hul aktiewe deelname aan, asook hul betrokkenheid by die bepaling van die gebeure in die klaskamer, veral gedurende die tweede siklus van die projek, toeskryf aan dié nuutgevonde selfvertroue. Alhoewel hierdie verandering aan natuurlike rypwording toegeskryf kan word, kan ek uit my ondervinding as onderwyser my nie herinner aan 'n groep studente wat so 'n mate van groei binne so 'n kort tydperk geopenbaar het nie. Ek wil graag, soos die studente, hierdie groei grotendeels toeskryf aan hul deelname aan die aksienavorsingsprojek (vergelyk Grundy & Kemmis, 1984:21).

Onderwysers betrokke by aksienavorsingsprojekte sou egter myns insiens moet waak teen ooroptimisme aan die een kant en wanhoop aan die ander. Só kan 'n aksienavorsingsprojek die ideale vertrekpunt vir onderwysers wees om, hoe gering ook al, 'n bydrae te lewer tot meer demokratiese onderwyspraktyke.

'n Aksienavorsingsproses soos waarna hierbo verwys is moet slegs as een van die momente in 'n steeds voortvloeiende proses gesien word. Vanessa Brown, wat opgetree het as medenavorser en waarnemer, se kommentaar na afloop van die projek is in dié verband veral insiggewend. Sy meen:

> *Accepted ways of doing things and of thinking had changed, as was evidenced by the comments made by those involved. But one wonders what those same students would be like next year, once they have forever left that particular history class, and without Trevor at the school. Sadly, the constraints have been and will continue to be felt by those students, such that they will look upon this year in later years as a wonderful experience which could never be repeated. Change is difficult in the first place, but when the supportive conditions (of a concerned teacher) disappear, and in the face of the powerful and dominant relations in schools which determine how things will be done and indeed what and how people should think, it becomes impossible to sustain such change. This makes one begin to think practically about the things which need to change if we happen to begin changing schools and the way people think and act, and it makes one realise that the individual classroom is where it begins, and if it were to end there, little would have been achieved* (Action research project report 11, September 1989).

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Chapter 7

Some challenges facing emancipatory action research in South Africa

June Pym

I will be writing particularly about the challenges that are found in a grass-roots education situation. In order to do that, it is necessary to highlight some basic understanding of what is meant when talking about emancipatory action research.

McNiff states that "it is this conjoint experiencing, this mutually supportive dialogue, that is the action of research that brings people together as explorers of their own destiny, rather than alienates them as operators and puppets" (1988:7). This process involves dialogue between teachers – participation, collaboration and collective control. Action research is an approach to encourage teachers to be aware of and reflective about their own practice, to be critical of that practice, to understand the situations in which practices are carried out, and to be open to changing practices and the situations within which they are found. It involves an appraisal of what, why, how, and by whom things are being done, at both a personal and a structural level. Action research can help teachers understand how their practices are socially constructed and historically embedded and provide a challenge to unseen constraints and established authority. Critical reflection not only offers the possibility of changing teaching practices, but also the progressive transformation of schools by linking teachers within schools to broader oppositional forces (Walker, 1988:151). Perhaps it is important to mention that it is possible that action research could focus on observation and description with technical explanations and actions, thereby focusing on school improvement rather than being an emancipatory mode of education.

With this brief overview of emancipatory action research in mind, an essential element is one of joint reflection and appraisal in order to re-direct and transform. I want to particularly look at the challenge of appraisal and the potential issues therein. This is a conscious "on the ground" look at some of the realities and issues, rather than the answers, that are facing an emancipatory action research style of education.

Traditionally, the only form of appraisal in South African education has been inspection that has been directed from the state to the teacher and the school to ensure that particular policies and values are imparted. Since 1976 the system of inspection has been increasingly exposed and attacked. Nationally there is a recognised need and an urge to consider the whole issue of teacher evaluation. In this regard, there is an acknowledgement in many progressive bodies that accountability in the teaching profession is critical. However, workable situations, if not models, have yet to be planned and designed. This is particularly pertinent in the light of the present retrenchments, presenting an interface between the political and education struggle. In the South African context, it is important to explore and understand the political and transformative ramifications of an evaluation process that moves beyond supposed appraisal in the form of inspection and examination results.

A major problem has been the focus on what teachers do, the appraisal process being a one-way individualistic evaluation from an outside evaluator to the teacher. Because most teachers don't have the opportunity to reflect critically on practice with others, the inadequacy of those practices often remains hidden, and analysis remains fixated at the level of attending to technical problems (Smyth, 1987:1).

With this ethos, the influence of the dominant tradition on pedagogy and teachers has gone undetected (Gitlin & Smyth, 1990:83). This has left teachers dependent on supposed experts, and less able to see and respond to the political, ethical, and moral questions that are an inherent part of the teaching process. The consequence is that hierarchy is strengthened, in which case teachers either lose their voice in shaping the nature of educational experiences, leaving teaching unchanged, or find ways of temporarily escaping the dominating effects of hierarchy. In both cases, this one-way nature of evaluation encourages a type of learning that legitimates a form of authoritarianism. For evaluation to be effective, the nature, quality and direction of education needs to be debated at a broad based level

(Mortimore & Stone, 1991) so that the evaluation process reorientates, focuses, and energises participants toward transforming their reality (Hartshorne, 1989).

The school where I work is a church school in Athlone. The school has had no system of evaluation. Teachers have never formally been accountable to anyone in terms of lesson content, structure, process and preparation. This has created a situation that lends itself to extremes: an enormous amount of latitude for the creative, conscientious teacher, but equally the same degree of lack of answerability for inefficient, haphazard teachers. Ironically, not having any system of appraisal does not contribute to the well-being of the teachers or the life of the school. Rather, it has led to either the continuation of poor teaching practices, or dismissals without a conscious understanding of the process leading to the actual dismissal. Until recently the authority regarding perceived "good" or "poor" teaching, has ultimately rested with the principal's discretion. This has created a sense of disempowerment amongst the staff, feeling excluded from decision-making procedures and more alienated in terms of reflecting on their own teaching practice. Contributing to this disempowerment has been a lack of formal structures to address and communicate issues of concern by the staff regarding professional matters. This includes no procedures or structures for reflection on teaching and the school structure. Except for individuals, the school structure has had few links and sense of accountability to the community. It has tended to act in isolation, and not as linked to the broader national issues and concerns.

There is now a changed leadership within the school. With this background, we are now creating opportunities for teachers to critically assess and rethink the ends toward which they work. This involves a dialogical relationship which empowers participants to look critically at taken-for granted assumptions. The appraisal process would therefore involve teachers determining the focus of the evaluation and helping with the interpretation thereof. This means exploring to what degree and in what way it is tenable for teachers to themselves democratically draw up the criteria to be included in an evaluation programme and to use these criteria to evaluate their own teaching practice and the general practices of the school.

This would also involve teachers considering whether there should be other participants in the process e.g. students and parents. James (1982) states that a number of investigations of school-based evaluations have involved someone outside the school. It seems that "external intervention" may be desirable. It is questionable whether teachers can ever detach themselves from what has become familiar in order to subject it to critical scrutiny. External intervention can help to render the familiar as strange and raise teachers' awareness of issues they take for granted.

Disagreements between interpretations will be a particularly rich source in ascertaining what the disagreement underscores and how it could be resolved (Mathison, 1988:15). The difference between this type of intervention and the traditional "inspector" lies in the conditions under which the outside involvement is negotiated (McCormick & James, 1983:143). Questions regarding the feasibility of a national assessment/appraisal policy and practice would need to be considered. Because my school is relatively autonomous from State structures, its relationship and links with the general thrust of national education would be essential to examine.

It is here that an "external" person could be crucial in formally linking the school with the broader context.

A challenge within all this is the question of who is to be considered accountable to whom. The East Sussex Accountability Project (McCormick & James, 1983:19) made a distinction between accountability to parents and students (moral accountability), to oneself and one's colleagues (professional accountability) and accountability to one's employers (contractual accountability). Elliott (1980) has pointed out that the association of accountability with specific audiences is problematic, and the classification of moral, professional and contractual accountability is probably more useful.

The first phase of the research has already been conducted with the consent of participating staff members at the school. This has involved several workshops looking at the following:

- A review of the school's mission statement i.e. its perceived goals and vision, what it is that we want to do at this school.

- A reflection on what we want to develop in students and what that might mean in the classroom.
- Looking at the action research process as a way of assessing whether we are matching up to these criteria. Working out an actual process of which teachers will visit whom, when and how.

The second phase will include, after six months of observation and reflection in classrooms:

- An evaluation which will be conducted to review the whole process to that point.
- Another six months of continuous teacher evaluation which will culminate in another workshop to again review the process.

Thusfar, I have found the issue of collective control a particular challenge. Emancipatory action research should involve a dialogue between a broad base of participants in the appraisal process. Our school consists largely of a traditional, conservative parent body, which mainly espouses intransigent values and positions. They are generally very threatened by notions or movement that might begin to question and challenge the status quo. If one is accountable to a parent body that is inherently conserving, democratizing the research does not necessarily equate with emancipation. Perhaps it is here that it is useful to consider Elliott's moral, professional and contractual accountability, rather than focus on an "audience" per se.

Another issue that has arisen within this, is that of the position of the individual in relation to the collective reflection. Teachers may have collectively decided on criteria needed to achieve particular qualities, but individuals are not always at that point i.e. there is not necessarily a collective consciousness. Thus leaving open the question of how one develops that. It is clear that personal and structural transformations are delicately interwoven.

In conclusion, as this process proceeds, new challenges will emerge. The nature of action research allows contradictions and issues to continually arise, so that just when we think we "have it all together", we have "lost it"! Perhaps it is that quality that allows emancipation in continually reflecting and moving toward new horizons.

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Chapter 8

Action research and the challenge of change

Maureen Robinson

This paper draws on some of my recent experiences in the field of teacher development, as a basis for commenting on some challenges facing emancipatory action research in South Africa today.

For the last four years I have coordinated a small university-based project called the Materials Development Project (MDP), the aim of which has been to publish and disseminate innovative teaching materials of practising teachers. Besides working closely with individuals and groups of teachers on refining and editing their material, we have also been involved in a range of workshops to support and discuss the use of new teaching methods and materials. Our materials and methods have been characterised by attempts to make learning a process of active engagement for both teachers and students, with education being made meaningful through its connection with issues to do with the lives of South African students.

Motivation for the work of the Project has been found in the writings of theorists like Aronowitz and Giroux, Apple, and Freire and Shor who argue that teachers are consistently "deskilled" in their role, in that they are not expected to themselves design material for use in their own classrooms. To quote Aronowitz and Giroux:

> *By dictating every aspect of the teaching process these curriculum packages reproduce standardization and control that reduces the teacher to the status of a mere technician implementing ideologies and interests constructed by people external to the actual experience of his or her classroom and student interests* (1987:149).

Thus, they argue, teachers become separated from the learning involved in conceptualising, evaluating and selecting teaching materials, and become technicians who are simply expected to transmit rather than produce knowledge. In the MDP, similarly, our commitment to the involvement of teachers in the development and evaluation of new materials stems from a commitment to facilitating processes of teacher empowerment in an utterly disempowered South African teaching force. Thus we have attempted to focus on the process of materials writing as well as on the quality of the product.

While the MDP does not bill itself as a research project *per se*, we have increasingly come to realise that the approach we use draws very much from action research, in that the process of materials development takes shape through collaborative teacher reflection, action and evaluation. Our materials derive mostly from teachers who have (individually or collectively) questioned the value and direction of their normal teaching practice, identified ways of improving that practice, designed and carried out innovative ideas in their classrooms, and made their findings public in the form of resource packs for other teachers.

At the heart of our work lies a political commitment which positions our work within the framework of emancipatory action research. Emancipatory action research, by definition, believes that the work of the classroom cannot be separated from the struggle to build a just society. In the same way we have consistently linked our work to the call within the People's Education movement to build a democratic education system within a democratic society, and have sought to give expression to our emancipatory claims through active links with educational organisations engaged in resisting the ravages of apartheid education at the level of classrooms, schools and society.

In 1987, at a conference on People's Education for teachers, the (then) Western Cape Teachers' Union (now amalgamated into the South African Democratic Teachers' Union, SADTU), made the point that:

> *A post-apartheid South Africa will need post-apartheid teachers, as able as their students to reflect critically on the social and cultural forces which shape their lives, and a perception of their ability to change things actively* (NECC and UWC, 1987:24).

It is this notion of the "post-apartheid teacher" that has driven much of what we have attempted to do within the MDP, and it is with regard to this challenge that I make my observations about emancipatory action research in South Africa. From the outset it should be noted, however, that the whole issue of emancipatory action research assumes a far greater significance in South Africa than in many other parts of the world, where educational researchers are less driven by the enormous demands of political resistance and reconstruction.

Michael Fullan has written extensively about the extent to which change agents underestimate the complexity of any change process, and reminds us that:

> *Change is full of paradoxes. Being deeply committed to a particular change in itself provides no guidelines for attaining the change* (1991:102).

It is this point that underpins what I have to say about the challenges facing emancipatory action research in South Africa today. For while the rhetoric and politics surrounding a new education system is vociferously present, it is our experience that the real demands of fundamentally transforming an education system are often underestimated. It is as if there is a kind of political romanticism in the air, which believes that a new government will bring a new educational dispensation, introducing new kinds of teachers and different ways of teaching. And it is precisely this that even our limited experience has shown will not happen.

Some observations from our own work illustrate the complexity of teacher development through emancipatory action research.

Recently we have been involved in a programme at a "coloured" House of Representatives school which has decided to enrol a number of "black" students from Department of Education and Training schools. In consultation with a small group of teachers from the school, a programme was designed which would engage the whole staff in a form of action research, involving the new challenges they faced as teachers in a non-racial, multilingual environment. It was felt that there would be little chance of any programme succeeding unless the teachers themselves identified goals and strategies within their own settings. At the first workshop teachers discussed with one another what they saw as the "problem" and agreed to link up with a "research partner", another teacher who would help them to reflect on and initiate changes in their teaching to respond to the new situation at the school.

While the enthusiasm and the motivation on the part of the teachers appeared high, the report-back workshop three months later revealed that most of the teachers had made little headway in initiating or reflecting on any changes in their teaching, many not even having got as far as finding a research partner. A range of reasons were given for the lack of progress: the pressure of preparing students for the impending exams, the time needed to set, write and mark the exams, the national stayaway at that time around the transfer of power in the country, the tension borne of the threatened retrenchment of teachers, the lack of support from the school leadership, the absence of time within the school day for such discussions and the unending number of other issues which the school had to face during that time. In short, it seemed that educational innovation, even within an action research framework which aimed deliberately at making the innovation meaningful to the participants, was doomed to flounder in the midst of a school system which was utterly unable to support processes of collaborative reflection, action and evaluation.

Another short example. In 1991 the MDP worked with a History teacher at a local school to document his attempts to include local history in the school curriculum, as part of building People's History at his school. The book itself has been very well received, and has attracted quite a lot of attention, especially from academics and publishers seeking to transform the school history syllabus. However, our brief experience of trying to run workshops with teachers to introduce them to the ideas within the book has led to the sobering reminder that new materials, however good and well-grounded the ideas, will not very easily be used by the majority of teachers. The responses from those teachers who attended the workshops were that they would not have time to do anything "extra" like local history because of the pressure of the prescribed syllabus, that their students lacked basic skills like writing and reading, never mind the more sophisticated skills to carry out the kinds of activities suggested in the book, that they themselves did not have the skills to assist their students with researching and compiling information, that their heads of department (or principals or subject advisers) would never allow them to do such work and that they would never be able to get the necessary cooperation of their History colleagues on the staff. In short, we left the workshops with a picture of a disillusioned teaching corps, characterised by a lack of confidence, resistance to change and overwhelming feelings of disempowerment.

Coming now to the challenges for emancipatory action research, I would like to make the following observations. Our work has shown us that the apparently simple task of empowering teachers through materials development is limited and constrained by a host of subjective and objective conditions for teachers. But we would not want to conclude that this makes teacher development a fruitless task. Rather, I would argue, we need to be looking at the short-term steps that can serve the longer-term goal of building a tradition of ongoing reflective enquiry and professional development on the part of teachers. One of these steps is to look at how schools are run, for the question of leadership has been identified as being crucial to a climate of innovation within schools, with the amount of time, respect and encouragement received from the top being crucial to teachers' own sense of support for implementing new ideas.

It is also our experience that there are the "radical purists" in education, who argue that much of the work that is done under the name of emancipatory teacher development addresses limited "practical" problems rather than the more fundamental issues around the relationship between school and society. It is as well to remember, though, that emancipatory action research, if it is to be true to itself, cannot operate in a social vacuum. It operates in real situations with real people and their real resistances, and programmes which move too far or too fast beyond teachers' own perceived interests stand little chance of teacher involvement or implementation. One small step for one teacher may indeed be one great leap for emancipatory practice, depending on how that small step is harnessed, supported and shared.

In this regard, then, the boundaries between Grundy's categories of technical, practical and emancipatory action research become blurred, for what may appear a technical intervention to some may be emancipatory in other settings. And, one might even go so far as to say that a tension could exist between critical pedagogy – which demands the interrogation of the ideological underpinnings of all classroom interaction – and emancipatory action research, which may in some instances aim no further than the loose engagement of a few previously "voiceless" teachers in processes of debate, whatever the conclusions of that debate.

In essence, then, what do I see as the major challenges for us in our work to promote emancipatory practices through action research?

I would argue that action research forms a powerful basis for teacher development in South Africa. It is crucial that teachers in a post-apartheid education system understand, identify with, feel committed to, and are able to critically evaluate the demands placed on them, for these demands will be many and difficult. The sustaining power of new policies will depend on the meaningful participation of those carrying out the policy changes, and a sense of involvement and ownership needs to form the basis of that participation.

Teacher development needs to be seen as part of a national strategy around the reconstruction of a culture of learning. For this to happen we will need a delicate combination of top-down political and educational policies and bottom-up commitment and involvement. In this regard we see our task in the MDP as manifold: to research conditions for change in the schools, to engage in grassroots programmes as part of an ongoing dialogue with teachers about their real conditions, to work towards a national policy on teacher education which supports action research in schools, and to continue to support struggles for democracy inside and outside the school, at both a micro and a macro level.

Most important to this is to build a network of teacher educators committed to emancipatory action, so that ideas and experiences can be shared, and resources pooled. To this end I continue to hold on to a picture of groups of teachers, at the same or different schools, actively engaged in debate about the kinds of values, knowledge and skills they would hope to promote in society through their teaching, and sharing ideas about how they would like to get there. Meeting a simple challenge like that would, I believe, go a long way to penetrating the culture of passivity which dominates too many of our schools at present, and to establishing much-needed practices of school-based teacher reflection and professional development.

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Chapter 9

Emancipatory action research in South Africa: Fanning the fires of theory and practice

Sue Davidoff

> *In emancipatory action research the guiding ethic extends beyond the individual level to the social. In addition to respect for individuals, symmetrical communication ... presupposes a common striving for consensus. True consensus, moreover, is possible only in the conditions of equality for participants. The guiding ethic of emancipatory action research, therefore, embodies the social and political ideals of freedom, equality and justice* (Grundy, 1987:155-156).
>
> *Emancipatory action research is an empowering process for participants; it engages them in the struggle for more rational, just, democratic and fulfilling forms of education* (Carr & Kemmis, 1986:205).
>
> *By its nature, educational action research as critical educational science is concerned with the question of control of education, and it comes out on the side of the control of education by self-critical communities of researchers, including teachers, students, parents, educational administrators and others. Creating the conditions under which these participants can take collaborative responsibility for the development and reform of education is the task of a critical educational science. Educational action research offers a means by which this can be achieved* (Carr & Kemmis, 1986:211).

The realities

My work involves, among other things, facilitating action research processes with teachers. My comments about the challenges of emancipatory action research in South Africa will come from this perspective. It has been my experience in South Africa that within certain action research circles there has been a preoccupation with the notion of emancipatory action research, transformation, and so on. And rightly so. Without this concern, we might well be validating apartheid education by enabling teachers to cope better with less, to become more resourceful, and in so doing, to demand less and perhaps even feel the need for less. Walker (1990) highlights this problem in her article *Action research in South African schools: Gilding Gutter education or transforming teaching?*

However, the emancipatory bandwagon, while offering a challenging and exciting journey, has not, I fear, begun to address the issue of how difficult it is to become a "real" emancipatory action researcher in South Africa. As an action research facilitator, I have encountered these problems countless times, and they have raised very serious questions for me. So let us look at what the claims of emancipatory action research are, and let us then look at these in our own context. It is my belief that in South Africa at present, and traditionally, most of our educational structures mitigate against the development of emancipatory action research praxis. Hence the importance; hence the difficulties.

First, emancipatory action research is said to be collaborative. Collaborative between whom? Between teacher and teacher, between teacher and students, between teacher and facilitator. My experience has been that, in reality, establishing a collaborative ethos is extremely difficult. Most teachers feel most comfortable working in isolation, on their own in their own classrooms. Having visitors is invariably associated with inspection, that watchdog activity which teachers find undermining, disempowering and very scary.

In one school in which I worked with seven teachers trying to establish a collaborative action research project, one of the participants said:

> *The group has been very supportive, even if I feel that lessons have felt disastrous. If there is one good thing, it gives me a boost. At first I felt threatened, but now there is enough trust in the group for me to accept feedback.*

And another had the following to say:

> *This process has taken away a sense of isolation. Previously I felt as though I was working in a vacuum – this reflection develops a base and confidence for me.*

When beginning to work with teachers, it mostly seems that there is little enthusiasm for or openness to my working with them in their classrooms. The immediate response is one of feeling threatened and judged or evaluated. The tradition of inspection in South Africa makes this response understandable – there simply is not a tradition of supportive classroom-based inservice work from which teachers can draw. Isolationism is part of the culture of our schooling, often even among the most progressive teachers. Team teaching, for example, is barely developed. The relationship of mistrust between departments of education and teachers (in the form of inspections) makes principals', heads of department, or even other teachers' visits to classes, a fraught situation, resisted overtly or covertly. Breaking the isolation means building a new culture of collaboration, rather than merely encouraging a new kind of working together.

Secondly, emancipatory action research is democratic. This implies that changes in classroom practice will be in the direction of greater student and teacher voice. This means, as Carr and Kemmis argue, teachers taking control of education. Let us look at the tradition in South African education. It is notorious for its extreme authoritarianism and anti-democratic practice. Teachers question or challenge the status quo, and they find themselves suspended, or transferred. Activist teachers have been watched extremely carefully. Extremely tight control over what is taught has provided little space for teachers to share their own concerns or values, and when this goes against government policy, the situation is dealt with "appropriately".

Moreover, besides the control which the departments exercise, principals in schools are powerful people. Schools are almost always structured in a top-down hierarchical manner. Besides the formalised power-relations, there are also informal power relations, which have to do with age, gender, length of time at a particular school, personal relationships with people in authority, etc. Principals have the power to block any initiative in their schools. Creating democratic practices in school structures is rare practice indeed. In this way, our schools (even the most progressive ones) tend to mirror our extremely undemocratic society.

Carr and Kemmis (1986:199) maintain that "all those involved in the research process should come to participate equally in all its phases of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. In this, action research is democratic". Equal participation in action research processes is, at present, extremely difficult to realise.

Participation is yet another element in emancipatory action research. By participation we understand active participation on the part of teachers and students in a classroom situation. For teachers it would mean taking ownership of the change process, and becoming critically engaged in the development of the curriculum. For the students it would mean becoming actively engaged in the learning process, and active in shaping the direction and meaning of classroom work.

In contrast, what is most frequently experienced is teachers relying on the expertise of "outside experts", transmission-style teaching where textbook material is passively accepted by teachers and passed on to students, who are equally expected to accept the material uncritically. Of course there are many teachers who are working differently, and who do engage critically, but by and large this is the exception rather than the rule.

Participating actively in all the moments of the action research cycle – that is, planning, teaching, observing and reflecting, suggests that teachers are able to either problematise their classroom situation, or articulate their values and educational aims, in order to plan appropriate lessons. This leads us to the next aspect of emancipatory action research: teachers as reflective practitioners, reflecting on their classroom realities within a broader social context.

In this regard, it has been my experience that many teachers, especially from the more disadvantaged communities, are simply not in a position to work at this level. In fact, this kind of reflective practice seems to be perceived almost on the level of a meta-activity: one step removed from the daily realities and needs of classrooms, students and teachers. Teachers' requests are for facilitators to teach so that they can model their teaching, to bring resources, to make resources available to them; in short, to be active in suggesting and providing viable options in their impoverished circumstances. As Walker argues:

> ... *imperfectly understood at the time ... was the critical point later underscored by Elliott* (1988): *far from being imposed on teachers by academic researchers, action research developed organically from an existing teacher culture receptive to notions of innovation, of reflective practice, and curriculum theorising. Indeed, Elliott stresses, it presupposed such a culture. The point is that action research was rooted both in teachers' view of themselves as autonomous professionals, and a well-established movement for curriculum as process* (1992:5).

Walker then goes on to comment:

> *My South African experience showed that reflection in itself was not enough to shift existing practice where teachers lacked models of quality practice, and even technical teaching skills ... What gradually became clear was the need for teachers to acquire technical and practical knowledge, and that all three modes of action research might contribute towards this end* (1992:7).

My own experience supports Walker's perceptions. Moreover, when basic skills and materials are often not part of teachers' daily repertoires, how much less so would be their ability to reflect upon their practice, and then within the broader social concerns of equality, justice and freedom?

This last point is perhaps one of the most crucial in emancipatory action research: that is, where the guiding ethic extends beyond the individual to the social. Here emancipatory action researchers and facilitators would be reflecting on their experiences with a picture of the classroom as a microcosm of broader social and political realities. It is here where teachers would be making their contribution towards justice, equality and freedom.

Given the constraints described above, facilitating a process of building this kind of critical consciousness often feels very far removed from "where teachers are" (another addendum to the action research process). Social relations at the schools often do not lend themselves to any of these – justice, equality or freedom. Nor, frequently, do teachers have concerns beyond their classroom. Nor do they necessarily see any relationship between their classrooms and social relations beyond the classroom. As an action researcher facilitator, there is always this tension of raising these issues critically, and working with teachers with their lived experiences and real concerns.

The challenges

So how then do we begin to address these very real constraints in our South African context? How do we encourage reflective practice, teachers as learners, curriculum as process, developing critical consciousness, serving an emancipatory interest? What is the starting point? And then how do we proceed?

There are, I believe, no straightforward and simple answers, and no blueprints. There are, however, certain threads, which when looked at in the context of broader aims, can provide some tentative guidelines. I would argue that the issue of sustaining educational change, is of primary concern. I would also like to suggest that, given our particular situation in South Africa, it is crucial for us to start with where teachers are, and where they are is not necessarily located in a tradition of innovative and reflective practice. For those of us working as facilitators or teacher educators, or teachers interested in action research, this can be the only real starting point, rather than a preconception of what constitutes real emancipatory action research.

What I am suggesting is that we need to think big and start small. Holding this tension seems to be of vital concern if we start with respect for where teachers are, rather than how emancipatory action research might be conducted. Our focus, as facilitators, needs to hold within it the broader issues; at the same time, our relationship with the people with whom we work needs to be founded on respect and trust. This is most likely to happen if we take seriously teachers' contexts, expressed concerns and needs. It is vital to create a "safe" environment so that teachers can begin to share their own anxieties and uncertainties as well as their hopes and ideals.

Perhaps one way of facilitating those more fundamental paradigm shifts is by beginning to ask critical questions – questions which can highlight broader social concerns but which are reflected in the microcosm of the classroom. For example, one teacher with whom I worked had given her class a play to act out. The play characterised the "ideal" wife as an obedient, domesticated woman, while the wayward women drank or were "lazy" – i.e. did not want to do housework. Although the children enjoyed the dramatic moments in the play enormously, the gender messages they were receiving were problematic for me. It was an authentic question, which I raised with the teacher concerned. Our conversation yielded no clear cut answers or immediate emancipatory transformations, but did serve to question certain values which had previously been taken for granted.

Seeing the world reflected in the classroom and classroom dynamics played out in the world enables teachers to begin to address issues around justice and freedom without feeling that they have to take on and transform the world. For me this is one of the dangers and misconceptions of emancipatory action research. Parallels between macro and micro situations need to be authentic. I have sat in many classes where teachers feel they have to make conscious connections between subject matter and political concerns in order to qualify as emancipatory teachers!

Another way of looking at thinking big and starting small has to do with institutional change. It has been my experience that when teachers start talking to one another, sharing problems, experiences and successes, then their concerns tend to become broader than the classroom itself, but perhaps encompass the school, and then the environment around the school, and how this impacts on school life ... At several schools where I have worked with teachers, whenever we met as a group, social issues would automatically come up: discipline problems because of home backgrounds, pregnancies of girls where parents knew nothing about it, truancy, poverty, squatter communities, health problems, language issues for migrant children etc. etc. Broadening the base of action research (or reflective practice) in a school helped to shift consciousness from the world of the classroom to the world of the school to the world beyond. Values become more conscious in this way. In my experience, this happens far more easily with groups of teachers than individual teachers.

Linked to this then is the question of the whole school itself, and how it supports and is supported by change. Ideally, whole schools need to be engaged in processes of reflective practice, of building visions, of building shared values and identities. This has been a growing area of focus in our project, and one in which action research can be helpful in school-wide change as well as classroom change.

However, it is important not to be dogmatic in this regard, but rather to see this process more dialectically. Schools can begin to change through the endeavors of one particular teacher; similarly, school-wide change attempts can make a contribution to individual classroom change. Fullan and Hargreaves put it in the following way:

> *It is individuals and small groups of teachers and heads who must create the school and professional culture they want* (1992:139).

Yet at the same time, they say that:

> *If school systems ... are to create total teachers and total schools, they need to grasp the realities of empowerment, not just the rhetoric* (1992:130).

Starting with where teachers are also means working together with them on building technical expertise and subject knowledge where necessary (rather than taking the position that this is not the domain of emancipatory action research). And in the long term, teacher transformation and school-wide change need to be supported by policy changes as well – policies which have as their guiding principle ongoing professional and personal development for teachers.

Finally, I would like to tread with caution around the seemingly absolute claims that Grundy and Carr and Kemmis tend to make about emancipatory action research: "symmetrical communication"; "true consensus"; "control of education" ... and perhaps think, in our context, more fluidly about first steps like teachers welcoming "outsiders" into their classrooms, or wanting to become more creative, or actively engaging in materials development. These gains, it would seem to me, are real steps towards emancipation.

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Chapter 10

Critical social science and the emancipatory interest

Johann Mouton

Introduction

The aim of this paper is twofold: First, to recount in very general terms the origins of the emancipatory interest as espoused by critical theory in the twentieth century. In this overview I will concentrate on the work of Jürgen Habermas, but also refer briefly to Horkheimer. The second section of the paper will be devoted to a detailed discussion of the more recent work of Brian Fay. Fay has attempted to "translate" the ideas of Habermas into a "methodology" of social research. In this process, he has, I believe, taken the debate on the meaning of "emancipation" much further. He has, in particular, revealed the shortcomings in the current ideas on emancipation and has made worthwhile suggestions about how these shortcomings could be overcome.

Horkheimer and Habermas

The 1930's saw the clear dominance of logical positivism in the philosophy of science. But this dominance did not go unchallenged – from phenomenologists like Husserl, anti-inductivists like Popper and also the newly formed Frankfurt School. In this time, Horkheimer wrote an article which was to become a classic entitled *Traditional and critical theory*. In this article his main objective was to contrast traditional theory – as expounded by positivism – with critical theory as originally worked out by Kant and Hegel. For Horkheimer

> *... The goal of such theory is a universal systematic science ... theory in the fullest sense is "a systematically linked set of propositions, taking the form of a systematically unified deduction"* (1976::206-208).

According to Horkheimer, the social sciences have in fact tried to emulate this positivistic notion of theory, but only with limited success.

> *If theoretical work is to be done, it must be done with an eye unwaveringly on the facts; there can be no thought in the foreseeable future of comprehensive theoretical statements. These scholars are much enamoured of the methods of exact formulation and, in particular, of mathematical procedures ...* (1976:209).

The problem is that this naturalistic approach to social phenomena inevitably leads to a split in the roles of scholars: on the one hand as scientists who regard social reality and its products which are extrinsic to them, and on the other hand as citizens where they exercise their interest in social reality through political articles, membership in political parties or social service organisations and participation in elections.

It is exactly the explicit recognition of the connection of knowledge and interests, of theory and practice, that distinguishes critical from traditional theory and that justifies calling such theory critical.

> *By criticism, we mean that intellectual, and eventually practical effort which is not satisfied to accept the prevailing ideas, actions and social conditions unthinkingly and from mere habit; effort which aims to coordinate the individual sides of social life with each other and with the general ideas and aims of the epoch, to deduce them genetically, to distinguish the appearance from the essence, to examine the foundations of things, in short, really to know them* (Horkheimer, 1976:270).

Critical theory, therefore, has a fundamental practical interest in radically changing human existence, of fostering the type of self-consciousness and understanding of existing social and political conditions so that "mankind will for the first time be a conscious subject and actively determine its own way of life" (Bernstein, 1976:181).

Habermas's project builds on Horkheimer's ideas. He wants to resurrect – through a reconstruction of the history of epistemology – authentic critical theory. The first paragraph of *Knowledge and human interests* already sets the scene:

> *I am undertaking a historically oriented attempt to reconstruct the prehistory of modern positivism with the systematic intention of analyzing the connections between knowledge and human interests. In following the process of the dissolution of epistemology, which has left the philosophy of science in its place, one make's one's way over abandoned stages of reflection* (1968:vii).

By the "dissolution of epistemology" Habermas means the replacement of the truly critical role of epistemology with relation to science (as advocated by Kant) by a mere methodology of science – as expounded by positivism. Habermas's reconstruction of the history of epistemology is itself an exercise in ideology critique – i.e. a critique of the dominant ideology of positivism. Kant's project was to answer the following question: What makes scientific knowledge possible? This transcendentalist project was, however, abandoned by the positivist paradigm which rejected philosophy – and therefore also epistemology – as a legitimate intellectual concern. Habermas's aim is to resurrect the critique of reason by asking a similar question: What are the interests, the cognitive or knowledge-constitutive interests, which make knowledge possible? Unlike Kant, however, he does not locate these interests in an apriori structure of reason, but in true Marxist tradition, in the material conditions of the evolution of the human species.

As Bernstein has correctly remarked, it is important to understand that Habermas's project is not purely epistemological:

> *thinking through the issues of the status and types of human knowledge requires thinking through the issue of what man is and can be. Habermas is developing a philosophical anthropology that singles out the distinctive characteristics of human social life that are the grounds of these basic knowledge-constitutive interests* (1976:192).

That there is a "basis of interests" follows, he argues, from an understanding of humans as both toolmaking and language-using animals: they must produce from nature what is needed for material existence through the manipulation and control of objects and communicate with others through the use of intersubjectively understood symbols within the context of rule-governed institutions. Thus, humankind has an interest in the creation of knowledge which would enable it to control objectified processes and to maintain communication. There is, however, on his account, a third interest: an interest in the reflective appropriation of human life, without which the interest-bound character of knowledge could not itself be grasped. This is an interest in reason, in the human capacity to be self-reflective and self-determining, to act rationally. As a result of it, knowledge is generated which enhances autonomy and responsibility: hence, it is an emancipatory interest (Held, 1980:255).

On the basis of these three cognitive interests – the technical, the practical and the emancipatory – Habermas distinguishes between three types of sciences: the empirical-analytic, the historical-hermeneutic and critical sciences. Let me cite Habermas on each of these:

> *In the empirical-analytic sciences the frame of reference that prejudges the meaning of possible statements establishes rules both for the construction of theories and for their critical testing. Theories comprise hypothetico-deductive connections of propositions, which permit the deduction of lawlike hypotheses with empirical content. The latter can be interpreted as statements about the covariance of observable events; given a set of initial conditions, they make predictions possible* (1972:308).

> *The historical-hermeneutic sciences gain knowledge in a different methodological framework. ... Access to the facts is provided by the understanding of meaning, not observation. The verification of lawlike hypotheses in the empirical-analytic sciences has its counterpart here in the interpretation of texts. Thus the rules of hermeneutics determine the possible meaning of the validity of statements in the cultural sciences* (1972:309).

The systematic sciences of social action, that is economics, sociology and political science, have the goal, as do the empirical-analytic sciences, of producing nomological knowledge. A critical social science, however, will not remain satisfied with this. It is concerned with going beyond this goal to determine when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action as such and when they express ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed. To the extent that this is the case, the critique of ideology, as well, moreover, as psychoanalysis, take into account that information about lawlike connections sets off a process of reflection in the consciousness of those whom the laws are about.

> ... *The methodological framework that determines the meaning of the validity of critical propositions of this category is established by the concept of self-reflection. The latter releases the subject from dependence on hypostatized powers. Self-reflection is determined by an emancipatory cognitive interest* (1972:310).

For Habermas, at least initially, psychoanalysis provided the best example of a discipline that incorporates this notion of methodological self-reflection. It requires a "depth hermeneutics" in which psychoanalytic interpretation is directed to the various ways in which the patient-subject fundamentally and systematically misunderstands him- or herself, and fails to grasp the significance of the symptoms from which he/she suffers. Analysts are concerned with and guided by their interest in helping patients to overcome their suffering and the debilitating symptoms that they exhibit. The analyst can only achieve this by helping to bring to consciousness the individual's distinctive self-formative processes. Habermas emphasises that what is required is an achievement by the patient – and by the therapist too – that is aimed at dissolving resistances.

Brian Fay's project of a critical social science

Even though Habermas uses psychoanalysis as an example, there are still too many unanswered questions to make an unequivocal application of this model to social research practice possible. One person who has tried to clarify these more philosophical positions in terms which are of relevance to practising social scientists is Brian Fay. Both in his earlier work *Social theory and political practice* (1975) and more recently in *Critical social science* (1987) his main objective is to explicate and "translate" in general terms Habermas's ideas for ordinary social scientists by focusing on what the emancipatory interest could mean in real life social research.

Although I want to concentrate on his more recent work, allow me briefly to quote two passages from the 1975 work in which Fay already simplifies the notions of a critical social science. According to Fay, a critical social science is one

> *that recognises that a great many of the actions people perform are caused by social conditions over which they have no control, and that a great deal of what people do to one another is not the result of conscious knowledge and choice. In other words, a critical social science is one which seeks to uncover those systems of social relationships which determine the actions of individuals and the unanticipated, though not accidental, consequences of these actions* (1975:94).

In practical terms, a critical social science is one which attempts to account for the sufferings and felt needs of the actors in a social group by seeing them as the result of certain structural conflicts in the social order, and it seeks to explain these conflicts – and hence the sufferings and felt needs – by giving a historical account in quasi-causal terms of the latent contradictions between the sorts of needs, wants, andpurposes which the social order gives rise to and the sorts of (inadequate) satisfactions which it provides (1975: 96).

Whether it is through the process of self-deception (individual) or because of false consciousness (society), human beings are constantly being affected by a variety of ideological distortions. We frequently mistake the false for the true, the apparent for the real, the changing and variable for the universal. Stated differently: human beings are both alienated from their true self and from society. The aim of a critical social science is to liberate human beings from their state of alienation through the process of self-reflection. As indicated in the first paragraph of this section, the aim is to transform or change the human condition through a critique of those alienating or repressive factors which sustain his/her alienation/self-deception/false consciousness. The core concept of the critical paradigm is therefore to be found in the idea of transformation: human beings who transform themselves and their environment through production/work.

In his 1987 work, Fay goes further by developing the outlines of a "critical social science". Although he devotes some space to an outline of the components and structure of a critical social science, his main focus is on the underlying foundations (ontological, anthropological and political) of such a science. I will attempt briefly to summarise some of the main points as they are relevant to a discussion of the concept of emancipation.

The main question that Fay addresses is the following: How can an explanatory theory (of social science) explain a social order in such a way that it becomes itself the catalyst which leads to the transformation of this social order? (1987:27). According to him, this is only possible if such a theory (and therefore, social science) meets three conditions:

(1) The liberation from a social order must be the result of the absorption of this theory by the audience, i.e. the condition of enlightenment. As we have already seen, this is mainly effected by such a theory providing an account which is radically different from the current self-perception of the actors and which will explain why they are in the situation of alienation/oppression/etc that they find themselves.

(2) But enlightenment in itself is of course not sufficient. Not only must a group come to understand themselves differently, they must be moved to action. But this only becomes possible when they are given the means to change their situations, i.e the condition of empowerment.

(3) And finally, empowerment becomes emancipation when the actors have succeeded in overthrowing the oppressors. The whole point of critical theory is to overturn these (oppressive) arrangements and to put into place another set in which people can relate and act in fuller, more satisfying ways.

Two other conditions need also to exist. First, the arrangements which are responsible for the suffering of a group addressed by a critical theory, must partly depend on the ignorance of the members of this group – otherwise, how could the learning of a mere theory have the desired effect? So the first condition refers to the presence of a group's "false consciousness". The second condition refers to the necessary existence and awareness of a social crisis. Fay's argument is very simple. In order for a critical theory to be effective it must be the case that the people whom it is supposed to liberate must be willing to listen and act on its message. But this is highly unlikely unless the level of discontent that they are experiencing is really high. But even this is not sufficient. What is needed is a situation in which some sort of choice is forced on people because they are no longer able to function as they have done in the past. What is needed is a crisis situation where people can not resist or even attempt to moderate change and continue as they have done in the past. .

This adds up to the following regarding critical social science:

> *For a social theory to be critical and practical as well as scientifically explanatory, the conditions described must be met. First, that there be a crisis in a social system; second, that this crisis be at least in part caused by the false consciousness of those experiencing it; third, that this false consciousness be amenable to the process of enlightenment I described; and fourth, that such enlightenment lead to emancipation in which a group, empowered by its new-found self-understanding, radically alters its social arrangements and thereby alleviates its suffering* (Fay, 1987:30).

Fay elaborates on this basic scheme by showing – even at the methodological level – how this scheme implies the application of a complex of four main theories. These, then are the following:

1. A theory of false consciousness which demonstrates how the self-understanding of a group of people are false, explains how, the members of this group came to have these self-understandings and contrasts them with an alternative self-understanding.

2. A theory of crisis which both spells out what a social crisis is and how a particular society is in such a crisis.

3. A theory of education which offers an account of the conditions necessary and sufficient for the kind of enlightenment envisioned by the theory and shows that these conditions obtain in the current social situation.

4. A theory of transformational action which identifies those aspects of a society which must be altered and details a plan of action of how this might be done.

But Fay then goes on to discuss in great depth some of the limiting factors which make the realisation of such a model in actual research very difficult, if not impossible. I will concentrate on two of these limiting factors: epistemological and power limits.

According to Fay there are two epistemological limits to this model. A primary assumption of the model is that social science has the ability to reveal to humans definitively who they are, such that can be fully transparent to themselves – the condition of enlightenment. But, says Fay, this really presupposes that we can replace the existing false consciousness with true consciousness. It presupposes that we have the methodological tools – i.e. the construction of narratives – that will lead us to the point where the social actors become fully self-transparent. Fay's basic argument is that the intrinsic historicity of human beings makes this impossible.

> *The ideal of rational self-clarity runs up against the essential historicity of human beings and the narratives we construct in order to know ourselves. There is no "genuine" narrative which will definitively reveal our identity* (1987:174).

There is a second epistemological limit, i.e. the assumption that a group of people will, when confronted with a certain rational reconstruction of their own situations, automatically appropriate this reconstruction as correct and reach consensus on which policies to adopt. Fay's counter argument is based on two theses: one, the fact that rational deliberation does not necessarily yield a single course of action (and we have numerous examples of this) and secondly, a point which explains the first, the fact that our theories, our explanations of ourselves and other people are underdetermined by empirical facts means that it is perfectly rational to accept the available "facts" and still to disagree on the decisions to be taken based upon them.

The second limiting factor refers to the notion of power. The mere fact that a group of people agrees – if they agree – on a certain course of action, does not of course, imply that they have the power to act as they wish. Fay's argument is very simple:

> *Humans are too intertwined in the causal nexus which comprises the world, and hence are inherently too dependent on events outside themselves and their possible control, for the ideal of autonomy to be appropriate* (1987:191) [and]
>
> ... *humans are embedded in situations which delimit their range of possible actions, and which determine the outcome of these actions. There is a givenness to the conditions of their existence which stand in opposition to their desire for autonomy. Life often involves choices among conflicting ideals and aspirations, among courses of actions none of which is what people really want, among evils which they are powerless to avoid* (1987:197).

But there are also other limiting factors which make the attainment of the emancipatory goal even more difficult. One such limit has been the topic of a major debate between Habermas and Gadamer, i.e. the role of tradition in self-reflection. A critical social theory, in its most basic form, encourages a group of people to free themselves from the hold which a certain tradition has on them, to reject any and all of traditional arrangements and activities which do not meet their needs as it defines it. But Fay is adamant that this is literally impossible. According to him "certain of our inheritances are so deeply a part of who we are that it is psychologically naive to think that we can regard them with an objective eye, ready to discard them when 'reason' shows them to be deficient" (1987:162).

In the last instance our identity as human beings is in part formed and perpetuated through and in tradition.

> *They are constituted out of the historical heritage they make their own, and they transform themselves in terms of the material provided to them from this heritage ... Thus, humans, can never treat the totality of their cultural inheritance as if it were something extraneous to them, as if they could reject all or any of it if they wished ... This fact about humans sets important limits on the activities of revolutionaries inspired by a critical theory, limit which they ignore to their moral peril* (1987:164).

I will suffice with this discussion of Fay's central arguments. What, therefore, are the conclusions that follow from these various discussions?

We have seen that Fay has taken the notion of emancipation much further than is found in most philosophical texts on this topic, by developing a fairly elaborate five point plan or scheme which constitutes the basic elements of a critical social science. The value of this scheme is that it shows how the notions of enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation are linked, but also how these notions are in fact dependent on a theory of crisis and a theory of false consciousness. The subsequent discussion of the limits of a critical social science, has revealed the following:

(1) The old Socratic thesis – knowledge leads to virtue – is still as problematic today as it was then. The mere fact that people are to be "enlightened" by a new explanation of their life situation, is no guarantee for action and this is so because of various very good reasons: social science is usually not able to construct a single explanation or narrative that effects the kind of enlightenment, the kind of true consciousness which is possible; even if there were agreement on the best possible explanation of a certain state of affairs, that in itself is not sufficient condition for a group of people to reach agreement on what course of action to take; and even if consensus were reached on what course of action to take, such a group might not have the necessary means to effect the intended changes. Again, then, we see that enlightenment and empowerment are in fact both necessary conditions for the achievement of emancipation.

(2) Even this model of critical social science has to contend with a criticism which has been levelled against most critical theorists and in particular against Habermas, i.e. the very strong belief in the power of human reason to effect radical change. Habermas, like Kant, remains in the last instance a rationalist! As Fay quite correctly argues, the old adage of "the truth shall set you free" cannot be accepted unconditionally. We have seen how the essential historicity of human beings, the fact that human beings are necessarily embedded in various networks of causal relations – not the least of which is tradition, calls into the question some of the underlying assumptions of critical social science. Fay summarizes it as follows:

> *Critical social science makes the promise it does because it presupposes that humans are broadly active beings whose powers of reflection and will are such that they can be rationally clear to themselves and can plausibly aspire to be autonomous. But this is a misleading picture of human nature ... Humans are not only active beings; they are also embodied, traditional, historical and embedded* (1987:208-209).

Fay's point, then, is that Habermas's notion of emancipation – with the concomitant ideals of enlightenment and empowerment – has been built on a very optimistic and also unrealistic ontology of human nature. An ontology that ignores the other side of human nature. His plea is that we must recognise the limits to human reason, the facts of dependency, concealment and repression, which all form part of being human.

In conclusion

The conclusion of our story is NOT that the emancipatory interest is not a worthwhile objective for social science. It has, however, shown, I believe, that any simplistic notion of "emancipation" should be rejected. The naive belief that social theory will automatically lead to enlightenment, which in turn will empower people to liberate themselves clearly requires revision. The value of Fay's analysis is that he has shown us one possible way to revise this position, i.e. to look again at the underlying anthropological assumptions of critical theory. Let me in conclusion, indicate what I believe some of these revisionist strategies could be:

(1) The acceptance of the limits of human rationality immediately forces us to develop a more complex model of the relationship between self-understanding and agency. This is clearly not an unmediated relationship. We should turn our attention, e.g. to studies in the area of social cognition which have attempted to isolate those various mediating and moderating factors in an attempt to better understand this relationship.

(2) Numerous studies have appeared in the last decade on the interdependency of agency and structure, e.g. Giddens's structuration theory, Bhaskar's theory of realism, etc. Again, Fay has drawn our attention to the fact that human agency is

embedded in various causal nexuses. The mutual interdependence of human agency and structures implies that a unilinear understanding of agency is doomed to failure.

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Chapter 11

Pragmatists, sceptics, evangelists, idealists? Towards shaping a critical tradition of action research in the South African context

Melanie Walker

> *To me it [action research] is essentially an activity for pragmatists and sceptics, really. Not for evangelists and not for idealists. Because it's about the art of the possible. But we must never be arrogant about what is possible and what is not possible. So there is a sense in which we never quite know how wise we are because the boundaries of what we can change ... is always problematic. And that is why we must always keep on reflecting about the problem. We will always wonder whether we are being too radical or too conservative. That is the dilemma that action researchers must confront within their experience.*[1]

Introduction

I have been asked both to provide an international overview of "emancipatory action research", and to locate it in the South African context. Now, the paper which follows does not claim to be either an exhaustive overview of emancipatory action research, or the development over time of action research in international contexts. I wanted to avoid a shopping list from Lewin to the present day, and, besides, Kemmis and McTaggart (1988a) have edited a comprehensive collection tracing the history and development of international action research to which I would rather refer you. Instead, this account is refracted through my own education autobiography where it intersects with an interest in the theory and practice of emancipatory action research, touching only on a limited number of key sources which have influenced my own thinking. These include texts by: Carr and Kemmis (1986) and others loosely within the "Deakin" tradition; Carr (1989); Elliott (1985, 1988, 1991a, 1991b); Grundy (1982, 1987);

Zeichner and his associates at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Liston and Zeichner, 1989; Noffke and Zeichner, 1987; Zeichner and Liston, 1987); Winter (1989). More peripherally, I mention Lomax (1991), Stenhouse (1975), Whitehead and Lomax (1987), and Fals Borda (1979) in Columbia.

Themes that have emerged for me over several years, and which will be taken up in the paper include:

- Revisiting the concepts of technical, practical and emancipatory action research and knowledge.
- The developoment of critical reflection so that a view becomes a review and not a repeat prescription. Is there a role for philosophical and social science theory in this process? And is there a direct correspondence between action research and critically reflective practice?
- Research versus development, including the tension between action (development) and the generation of public knowledge. By focussing on the emancipatory aspect, have we overlooked the research part? Who is action research for anyway?
- The form of action research texts.
- To be sure, these questions and themes overlap and intersect so that separating them out is somewhat artificial. This separation, then, should be seen only as an analytical tool, rather than a representation of how action research unfolds in real, messy and complex practical situations.

Highlighting the critical

A further disclaimer is also needed at the outset. I make no claims to know what the "essential" nature of emancipatory action research might be. Indeed I have reservations about such truth claims. This is not the same as saying that I do not have a point of view; the difference is my recognising that this view is a socially and historically constructed interpretation open to challenge and argument as we develop shared meaning about the worthwhileness of emancipatory action research. Otherwise, we run the risk of a "politically correct" view which reduces a complex term like "emancipation" to a unitary meaning which demands conformity and consensus, rather than dissent, contradiction and ambiguity. As Gibson (1985:63) reminds us, a critical theory must be critical of its own authorities. Nor, I am sure, do we want to establish an elite in-group of emancipatory action researchers which excludes others working in different ways. To do so would surely be to stifle the creative, diverse and flexible development of action research in South African settings.

The point is that critical reflection would seem to be a necessary condition for emancipatory action research – if this means anything it means a constant checking of our interpretations and understanding. The very nature of knowledge, after all, is that it is variable and uncertain. and has about it an element of error. Critique, as Foucault (1981, quoted in Smart, 1983:135-136) explains:

> *... doesn't have to be the premise of a deduction which concludes: this is then what needs to be done. It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in the process of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal. It doesn't have to lay down the law for the law. It isn't a stage in programming. It is a challenge directed to what is.*

Perhaps for similar reasons, both Elliott (1991b) and Whitehead (Whitehead and Lomax, 1987) oppose the institutionalisation of action research as policy. Elliott argues the importance of continuing to reflect, to deconstruct systems and structures on a voluntary basis, at different levels and in different ways. Given the emphasis on the institutionalisation of innovations in the current literature, and the present popularity of policy studies bearing on the reconstruction of education in this country this might be an interesting point of view to explore.

Theory and practice

I first became interested in action research in 1983, largely because it offered a form of research which addressed educational practice in ways which offered me the possibility of becoming a more skilled and flexible educator. But it was only in 1987 that I first undertook an action research study of my own practice as a facilitator of teacher development in the Primary Education Project (PREP).[2]

My own account, then, is a "text" to be interrogated by this audience. My understanding of the theory and practice of action research is grounded in a specific historical, educational and cultural context – apartheid education. It emerges from a process of shifting back and forth between the literature and working in the field, both as a facilitator in PREP, and more recently, in my staff development role in the Academic Development Centre (ADC) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

To separate my own practice of action research from my theorising would be unauthentic, leading me to identify what I see as another key theme for discussion – the dialectical relationship between theory and practice. Winter (1989:67) explicates this relationship well:

> *... theoretical critique cannot simply confront practice with an authoritative interpretation of events ... because it must recognise that theory itself will always be open to question, that the outcome of one phase of practical development will be a need and opportunity for further theoretical work.*

As Winter (1989:65) emphasises, the continued development and vitality of theory and practice are mutually dependent, for "theory separated from practice slips into abstract speculation and the ramification of jargon; practice separated from theory slips into self-justificatory reaction or self-perpetuating routine".

It is this separation of theory and practice which, I suspect, has stultified the development of strands of the Deakin tradition. While some academics at Deakin have continued to theorise emancipatory/participatory action research in sophisticated and radical language, there are far fewer recent accounts of action. Rhetoric like the following abounds: for example, McTaggart (1989:5) argues for the importance of ideology critique by groups as the most important aspect of participatory action research. For such groups:

> *... the knowledge of the academy can be most useful to help people see what they have intuitively understood – that their own subjectivity is likely to be gendered* (Eisenstein, 1984), *colonialised and nationalised* (Chatterjee, 1986), *Westernised* (Lanhupuy, 1987) *and supplanted by the mass enculturation of the capitalist impulse* (Aronowitz 1977, Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985).

While not denying that subjects may be constructed in the ways outlined above, nonetheless, rhetoric of this sort would most likely astonish anybody as an approach to working with ordinary teachers, for example, in township primary schools.

Practice

We need also to think about what we mean by "practice". Do we mean something like technical actions or social practices? Is "teaching" a narrow conception of practice, as opposed say, to education as a practice? Are schools for teaching or for education? MacIntyre's (1981, cited in McTaggart and Singh, 1986:416) definition of practice might be worth considering:

> *... any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative inquiry through which goods internal to that activity are realised, in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the goods and ends involved, are systematically extended ... Tic tac toe is not an example of practice in this sense, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess. Brick-laying is not a practice, but architecture is. Planting turnips is not a practice, farming is. So are the enquiries of physics, chemistry and biology, and so is the work of the historian, so are painting and music.*

MacIntyre distinguishes practices from institutions:

> *Practices must not be confused with institutions. Chess, physics and medicine are practices; chess clubs, laborotaries, universities and hospitals are institutions. Institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with ... external goods. They are involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards. Nor could they do otherwise if they are to sustain not only themselves, but also the practices of which they are bearers. For no practices can survive any length of time unsustained by institutions ... institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order in which the ideals and the creativity of the practice are*

> *always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the co-operative care for common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution.*

What does all this have to do with critical forms of action research? The Deakin seminar report (McTaggart and Singh, 1986:417) sums up:

> *... teaching should be seen as one's own practice of education. Action research on teaching could not then be conducted without cognizance of the traditions in which one taught, one's values, the internal goods and excellences of education, and external goods which might on the one hand be necessary to education, but which on the other hand, also put the practice of education at risk.*

But McIntyre's definition raises a further question for a developing critical action research network in South Africa? Who are the practitioners? Arguably a network which sees action research as something only (or mostly) done by teachers in schools, excludes a rich engagement with university lecturers researching their practice, and with people in a range of other professions such as nursing, occupational therapy, social work, medicine, and so on.

Three modes of action research

The concept of "emancipatory action research" emerges from the application of Habermas's (1972) three knowledge constitutive interests, – the technical, practical and emancipatory. I would like, thus, to explain where the concept of three modes of action research fits with my own understanding.

Given that there were no precedents for a school-based action research project in South Africa when PREP was conceptualised in 1986/7, the project design was thus influenced by two traditions in action research from the North. The first was the application to action research by Grundy (1982, 1987) and Carr and Kemmis (1986) of Habermas's (1972) three knowledge constitutive interests. Following Habermas, these writers explicate three modes of action research – the technical, practical and emancipatory.

Briefly, the technical form emphasises rule following, control, a curriculum designed by outside experts including pre-packaged curriculum materials. This form promotes efficient and effective practice in the interests of prediction and control rather than the development of teacher understanding of practice. Teachers and pupils are instruments of change and the nature of this change reinforces technical rationality. The practical form emphasises the self-understanding of practitioners, fostering teacher judgement and understanding in making decisions about classroom change in the interests of pupils. Proposals for action claim to be intelligent rather than correct. Nonetheless, the practical form lacks a critical focus on the structural context which shapes institutional practices.

By contrast the emancipatory form "promotes a critical consciousness which exhibits itself in political as well as practical action to promote change" (Grundy 1987:154). The guiding ethics of the research are the ideals of freedom, justice and equality. Furthermore emancipatory action research is collaborative, involving all participants as controllers of the research process. Carr and Kemmis's (1986:162) definition would therefore seem to describe the emancipatory form:

> *Action research is simply a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.*

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988b:5) in later revising this definition emphasise the collaborative aspect: "Action research is a form of *collective* self-reflective inquiry ..." (authors' emphasis).

Moreover, McTaggart and Singh (1986:427), summarising the debates at the *Fourth Generation Action Research Seminar* at Deakin in 1986, go even further to argue that the technical and practical forms do not constitute action research at all: "it will be emancipatory or it will not be called action research at all". Action research now implies taking an overtly political stand. In this, the Deakin tradition had been influenced both by engagement in action research with Aboriginal communities and through contact with activist-intellectuals from Latin America, notably Orlando Fals Borda. It is useful, thus, to note Borda's (1979:303) overtly revolutionary definition of action research:

> *Action research works ideologically and intellectually to arm society's exploited classes in order that they may assume their conscious roles as actors in history. This is the ultimate destination of knowledge, that which validates the praxis and fulfills the revolutionary commitment.*

McTaggart and Singh (1986:422) end up claiming that "the only social research that deserves the name action research is that which fairly immediately contributes to the struggle to identify and overcome inequity, irrationality and alienation". Yet, such claims take for granted the "truth" underpinning social constructs like "rationality" in ways which may not be emancipatory at all. On the other, their claims seem to assume both a linear view of learning, and a narrow instrumental view of knowledge production. What, one may ask, is emancipatory about this?

In turn, Zeichner (who has been a visiting fellow at Deakin) and his colleagues at Wisconsin-Madison have been influenced by the Deakin tradition in that they agree that the collaborative element in action research is critical, supporting therefore the Deakin argument that only if the research is collaborative can it be called action research (Zeichner and Liston, 1987). In their own teacher education programme, the broad purpose is to develop reflection both on teaching and the situations in which teaching is embedded.

Their action is theoretically informed, however, by Dewey (1933) and Van Manen (1977). From Dewey, they take the concepts of "reflective" and "routine" action, explicated as follows:

> *... reflective action entails the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the consequences to which it leads. Routine action is guided primarily by tradition, external authority, and circumstance* (Zeichner and Liston, 1987:24).

Following Van Manen (1977), they employ the concept of "three levels of reflectivity" which broadly correspond with Habermas's three knowledge forms. The first level is technical rationality where the concern is with the efficient and effective application of educational knowledge to attain pre-given ends. Neither these ends, nor the institutional contexts are problematised. A second level of "practical action" explicates and clarifies "the assumptions and predispositions underlying practical affairs and assessing the educational consequences towards which an action leads" (Zeichner and Liston, 1987:24).

> *The third level of critical reflection incorporates ethical and moral criteria – central questions ask which educational goals, experiences and activities lead towards forms of life which are mediated by concerns for justice, equity and concrete fulfillment, and whether current arrangements serve important human needs and satisfy important human purposes* (Zeichner and Liston, 1987:25).

Now, at this point, I want to draw directly on my experiences in PREP. Firstly, I want simply to note the attractiveness for me at that time (1987) of emancipatory action research. This affinity was reflected in a project design which envisaged that action research would constitute a major vehicle for teacher empowerment and educational transformation through developing a critical classroom pedagogy. Thus my own writing at that time reveals a confident assumption that the action research process in itself had "the potential to re-insert teacher agency into the struggle within education for the transformative schools, which aims to transform self and social relations ... rather than simply reproducing them" (Walker, 1988:150). In other words, I assumed that practitioner engagement in action research would logically (and inevitably) develop into critical reflection on schooling and society.

But I had underestimated the difficulties of doing emancipatory action research myself, of facilitating teachers' emancipatory action research, and even of facilitating action research at all. Thus two aspects of this experience need to be teased out. On the one hand, how the three modes of action research and the production of educational knowledge production articulated. On the other hand, whether action research in itself facilitates paradigm shifts for those who engage in it.

I should also mention the influence on my own practice of Stenhouse's (1975:142) view that "curriculum research and development ought to belong to the teacher". For Stenhouse (1975:165) it then followed that "it is difficult to see how teaching can be improved or how curriculum proposals can be evaluated without self-monitoring on the part of teachers". I note this because I had assumed that teachers would welcome the roles of curriculum developer and research participant. But imperfectly understood at the time PREP was designed and conceptualised, was the critical point later underscored by Elliott (1988): far from being imposed on teachers by academic researchers, action research developed organically from an existing teacher culture receptive to notions of innovation, of reflective practice, and curriculum theorising. Indeed, Elliott stresses, it presupposed such a culture. The point is that action research in England was rooted both in teachers' view of themselves as autonomous professionals, and a well-established movement for curriculum as process. A democratic and non-directive role for the outsider facilitator also then follows. The point is that research traditions cannot simply be transferred from Northern to Southern contexts without analysing what conditions made success feasible and possible.

Thus, by contrast to English schools in the 1960s and 1970s, no similar culture on which to build research and development endeavours existed in DET (Department of Education and Training) primary schools in 1987. In these schools the dominant teaching culture has been shaped by the educational legacy of bantu education, by experience of political oppression, and by the authoritarian working relations (including a centrally prescribed curriculum and textbooks) of the DET. Not only were teachers unfamiliar with any notion of themselves as curriculum shapers, at times they actively resisted such a role, wanting rather to "copy teaching styles". They demanded neither relevant research, nor a role for themselves as producers of research. This was further complicated by teachers' impoverished educational background and a mostly poor quality college training. Gwala (1988) argues convincingly that tertiary education in African colleges and universities has merely been an extension of the form and content of bantu education in schools, reinforcing, rather than interrupting a view of educational activity as being to replicate what is given.

My experience showed that both the teachers and myself had to acquire technical and practical knowledge as well as emancipatory knowledge, and that all three modes of action research might contribute to this end. This accords with the approach of Zeichner and his associates where all three levels of reflectivity contribute to their programme, albeit with particular emphasis on critical reflection. Nonetheless, this should not automatically be read off as constituting a technical or practical interest, for example. Both the teachers and I had to learn technical skills (of research, of facilitation, of curriculum development), but this is not the same as advocating a technocratic view of society and education, or elevating efficiency in a skill to efficiency as value. During the period of my involvement in PREP, my developing understanding was further clarified by Delpit (1986:384), who writes:

> *... a critical thinker who lacks the "skills" demanded by employers and institutions of higher learning can aspire to financial and social status only within the disenfranchised underworld ... we must insist on skills* ***within the context*** *of critical and creative thinking* (author's emphasis).

The point is rather that emancipatory knowledge cannot be divorced from technical or practical knowledge. Critical knowledge demands an underpinning of socially useful and relevant skills, and more than emancipatory rhetoric is needed to translate political commitment into transformed education relations. Mezirow (1981) explains it well. He maintains that "perspective transformation" engages all three learning domains, where the technical involves learning for task-related competence, the practical learning for interpersonal understanding, and the emancipatory learning for perspective transformation. As he notes, in real situations, all three are intertwined.

Despite achieving less than had been hoped for, the twin processes of reflective practice and curriculum development in PREP nonetheless did help teachers develop technical and practical skills which helped them work towards change in their classrooms. More than this, it also generated empowering and personally emancipatory moments for teachers.[3] As one principal summed it up: "We like to have teachers as learners in the schools" (quoted in Philcox, 1991:93).

The difference between involvement and participation

The notion of collaboration and participation is important in emancipatory forms of action research and McTaggart (1989:3) usefully differentiates between "involvement" and "participation":

> ***Authentic participation*** *in research means sharing in the way research is conceptualised, practised and brought to bear on the life-world. It means ownership – responsible agency in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practice. Mere involvement implies none of this; and creates the risk of co-option and exploitation of people in the realisation of the plans of others* (author's emphasis).

While I had set out to do emancipatory action research focussing on my own educational practice in working alongside teachers, in practice, this second-order action research remained a black-box mystery. Ideally, teachers should have been part of a critical community but this would be to beg the question of the real power differences between a white university-based facilitator and African primary school teachers. Teachers knew from the start of the project that I was a "researcher" – that I was researching my own practice, that I would write it up and share it with a wider audience. But differences (not necessarily negative) of context and skill, job description (teachers defined as teachers, myself defined as a researcher), and real constraints on teachers' time, in the end meant that I worked with them for curriculum change, but I tackled the second-order research alone. Therefore I would not claim the existence of a critical community of researchers – teachers were *participants* in the process of curriculum change, but only *involved* in the process of my own research.

This raises the further question, then, as to whether my own research can be considered emancipatory action research. On the one hand there is evidence in my research for a concern with the connections between schooling and society, for improvement in practice, and for the involvement of all participants in the process of change. But, while the process of changing practice was collaborative, my research on that process was not. Further, research requiring individual academic effort is in any case in potential conflict with this ideal (Groundwater-Smith, 1988) – a further point which it may be interesting to debate here.

In summary then, technical and practical forms of reflection on action/action research do, in my experience contribute to teacher development. Even the emancipatory form needs to be underpinned by technical and practical knowledge. The ideal of participation and the emancipatory interest is likely to be imperfectly realised in real situations. In the end, however, Grundy (1987:159) reminds us that "given the transcendent technical interest in our society" it is unlikely that "the emancipatory potential of action research will be fully realised in one situation". For all that, action research still "offers a programme for strategic action which opens up the *possibility* of working systematically in ways which foster freedom, equality and justice in learning environments and interactions" (emphasis added).

Paradigm shifts – from self-understandings to critical reflection

Regardless of the form or source of knowledge, in the research paradigm we will be exploring that knowledge should be used for emancipatory purposes. The choice is not so much to validate only one form or source of knowledge. Instead, it is to recognise a range of knowledge forms which produce knowledge for the explicit purpose of human emancipation.

In this respect, PREP was less successful. While democratic teachers and teacher educators need the skills to translate their political values into effective classroom action, the reverse holds too:

> *Students need technical skills to open doors, but they need to be able to think critically and creatively to participate in meaningful and potentially liberating work within those doors. Let there be no doubt: a "skilled" minority person who is also not capable of critical analysis becomes the trainable, low-level functionary of dominant society, simply the grease that keeps the institutions which orchestrate his or her oppression running smoothly* (Delpit, 1986:384).

Acquiring practical skills and reflecting on classroom action, divorced from critical analysis, was not a sufficient condition for the development of emancipatory education in my study. My experience showed that reflection in itself was not enough to shift existing practice where teachers lacked models of quality practice, and even technical teaching skills. Further, while the theory of non-directive facilitation sat well with my democratic values, in practice it proved problematic to expect these teachers to mysteriously metamorphose from where they were into critically reflective practitioners, when they lacked access to alternative ways of thinking, behaving and perceiving educational practice.

Thus, the action research process in itself did not shift teachers' self-understandings from technical and practical concerns to critical reflection and emancipatory action. My own work therefore suggests that the process of enquiry itself, while it may help develop classroom skills, will not *necessarily* shift into a critique of the contexts of that practice. What I came to understand instead, through my work with teachers, is that their starting points and their values, rather than some inherent logic in the research process itself, shape the probability of teachers being able to shift between classroom concerns and a critical understanding of institutional and social constraints. As Kelly (1985) notes of her own involvement in the Girls into Science and Technology Project (GIST), it is all very well to talk of making one's taken for granted reality strange. But without an outside view this may not happen, precisely because the familiar is taken for granted. She uses the example of sexism in classrooms which might not seem strange to teachers who have not questioned the patriarchal basis of our society. As she relates, this is all too evident in the writing of teacher researchers who continue to use "he" to describe all their pupils.

> *Instead, then, I would argue that critical or emancipatory action research is inherently political and arises from the practitioner's commitment to emancipatory politics. I would ask you all to think about how and from where your own commitment to an emancipatory form of action research arose. Certainly, in my case the key was politics, not action research.*

Even though emancipatory action research is fundamentally informed by a political commitment, an outside facilitator might nonetheless foster a climate that enables participants to examine beliefs, practices and norms. Someone who can challenge yet support, probe connections, reflect the groups thinking back and so on. But whether the facilitator can bring about paradigm shifts is more problematic. *The Fourth Generation Deakin Action Research Seminar* (see McTaggart and Singh, 1986) dismissed the notion of the outside facilitator bringing enlightenment as it were. Rather, participants argued that facilitators should be organic intellectuals who join critical communities.

Ironically, given his trenchant criticism ("a dangerous account") of Carr and Kemmis, this nonetheless brings the Deakin grouping closer to Elliott's (1991a) position, in that Elliott reasons that the self-understandings of practitioners are the source of critical reflection. Not surprisingly he robustly criticises the importation of social science theory to generate critique. This is not to say that Elliott (1985:244-245) ignores wider contexts, but he would see action research facilitating the shift possible from personal and professional critique to social critique:

> *The process of action research can bring the realization that certain gaps between theory and practice cannot be closed until something has been done to change contextual factors. In this case, action research may move from reflection on pedagogical strategies into reflection on political strategies undertaken to change "the system" in ways which make education possible.*

Elliott (1991a:117) further argues that the tensions and ambiguities of practitioner self-understandings generate:

> *the possibility of a self-generating, reflexive and critical pedagogy emerging as a form of action research. It is a possibility which renders false the distinction Carr and Kemmis draw between a "practical" and an "emancipatory" action research.*

In the latter view Elliott is arguably supported by Lomax (1991:23) who writes that action research is emancipatory in that "good practice is no longer defined by outsiders".

To be sure, Elliott (1991a) does not conceptualise action research as simply empowering individual autonomous teachers. Institutional settings are structurally shaped in ways which single individuals cannot change – this therefore implies the study of curriculum structures. He (Elliott, 1991a:52) therefore arrives at this definition of action research to "transform" the existing craft professional culture of teachers in England:

> Action *research improves practice by developing the practitioner's capacity for discrimination and judgement in particular complex human situations ... [it] develops practical wisdom, that is, the capacity to discern the right course of action when confronted with particular, complex and problematic states of affairs.*

By contrast, Carr and Kemmis (at least in their earlier work) argue that the self-understandings of practitioners alone cannot constitute a source of critical self-reflection and emancipatory action. Similarly, Winter (1987 and 1989) seems to accord a place to social science theory in shaping critical reflection, but locates this in terms of a dialectical relationship of theory and practice.

Paradigm shifts, however, seem unlikely to occur through the process of action research itself, outside of a democratic political commitment to emancipation. The argument perhaps turns on the critical quality of participants' reflections – if this is no more than commonsense how does this shift into "good sense" (Gramsci, 1971)? Are we claiming much more than a research process can deliver by ascribing the possibility to action research, emancipatory or otherwise?

Research versus development

Counterposing research and development is an unfortunate dichotomy in my view – research, I believe, is development but much of the literature polarises research and a contribution to a public body of knowledge, through publication on the one hand, and the development of practical wisdom on the other. Elliott (1991a), for example, considers that the fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice, rather than to produce knowledge. Although in an earlier article (Elliott, 1985), he does emphasise the need for teachers to publicise their findings in order to be regarded as teacher researchers. It is worth noting, too, that other strands action research, outside of education, for example, Rappoport (1970, quoted in Kelly, 1985:135) suggests that action research aims to contribute "both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science ".

Elliott, together with others like McTaggart and Singh (1986), further warns against action research being reduced to mere research technique or a package of methods.

What then constitutes "research" under the rubric "emancipatory action research"? In what sense is the research claim in emancipatory action research more than organised common sense?

Stenhouse (1981:9) defines research as "systematic enquiry *made public*", while Ebbutt (1985) claims that the distinguishing feature of action research is making teachers' reports open to public critique. McNiff (1988) claims that it is teachers' making public their claims to knowledge that defines their classroom enquiries as research. Finally, Stuart (1991:149) distinguishes between "reflection in action" and "action research":

> *Through action research teachers are helped to make the process [reflection in action] more conscious, more explicit, and more rigorous to the point where, if made available for public critique and discussion, it can be called research.*

Essentially the former would involve individual professional development, the latter a contribution to public knowledge. Ashton *et al* (1989:14) conclude that such positions seem "to imply a concept of research far removed from that of teachers simply enquiring more systematically into their practice".

Using the criteria of Stenhouse, Stuart and others I would claim that my own study qualifies as research in its contribution to a shared body of public knowledge about educational practice and research methodology. Yet if one emphasises "public scrutiny" of *written* reports, it is difficult to argue that teachers with whom I worked in PREP did "action research". What was a research project for me, was a curriculum development project for teachers, offering resources, expertise, support, and reflective teaching.

Nonetheless, I would claim that teachers were beginning to engage with teacher-research in their engagement in an embryonic research *process*, attempting to develop methods and materials appropriate to their own situation, collecting evidence with my help on these attempts, and individually and collectively discussing this evidence. Importantly, teachers interviewed at different times in the course of the project articulated a view of themselves as reflective, flexible learners who were engaged in improving their teaching, a view which is arguably integral to developing action research and a culture which supports rather than subverts change.

Reflective curriculum practitioners are centrally involved in the *production* of valuable educational knowledge, not only in implementing the curriculum. Besides, the experiential learning and personal knowledge production integral to teachers' learning in this project was the direct antithesis of imposed knowledge and hierarchical relationships whether within schools, between schools and education authorities or between schools and universities. Moreover, enhancing teachers' own intellectual abilities through experiential learning and reflective practice seems a prerequisite for their developing their pupils' higher order cognitive skills.

Thus, midway through the project I began to conceptualise a continuum from reflection to research, rather than a sharp dichotomy between these two activities. Change has to start somewhere, and if less was achieved than had been hoped for – reflective teaching rather than action research – this is not to say that the envisaged change should be abandoned. Rather it needs to be reformulated in the light of local conditions. In my own context, this reformulation lay in conceptualising a professional development continuum – from reflection to research.

Yet describing what the teachers did as "research", was a strategic and developmental, rather than an academic definition. Perhaps this too, is unfortunate and unworkable in the context of action research. Rather we might need to conceptualise another developmental continuum, this time of practitioner research which would intersect with the reflection-research continuum to form a matrix of professional and research development. At one end of the research development continuum might be reports, both shorter and longer and video and curriculum materials productions, and at the other the higher degree thesis and the journal article. The tension in my own work is how to validate practitioner reports and not straightjacket action research's development, while also insisting on rigour and quality research production, both by academics researching their own educational practice and by higher degree students.

Furthermore, emancipatory action research emphasises collaboration. Might publication not be an integral way to collaborate with peers across time and space, developing the theoretical maps which show how our work articulates with that of others? And, in a world where knowledge is increasingly the axis on which the developed world turns in dominating the globe,[4] how do developing countries like our own generate endogenous theories of action research, of teaching and learning, and educational change unless we publish our research? Anyway, I have to add that I am always struck by the fact that writers who downplay public critique of written research production are themselves extremely prolific in publishing their own work!

Besides, the struggle of writing for publication (however "publication" may be defined) is itself an important developmental process. Writing is more than the final product. It is the process through which we develop, clarify, explore, and reflect ideas back to ourselves and others for critique as we draft and redraft.

I believe, too, that there is a case to be made for emancipatory action research being underpinned by rigorous methods and critique, and resulting in quality reporting or thesis writing. A concern for rigour should not, however, be read off as divorcing method from methodology. The point is rather, that we cannot avoid the question as to how emancipatory action research is, if research method and publication is always secondary to professional development, rather a part of such development.

This is not an uncontested view. Somekh (1989) suggests that it is academics who are overly concerned with methodology, while a colleague in the ADC described the following as "arid":

> *Too great a concern to use the research to bring about change can turn it into a development project which emphasises translating ideas into practical applications and managerial strategies for their adoption at the expense of data collection and analysis* (Vulliamy and Webb, 1991:225).

To be sure, comments like that of Somekh underestimate, even take for granted, the vibrant and rigorous educational research tradition in units such as CARE, and universities across Britain, Europe, Australia and the USA, not to mention the domination of intellectual production by the developed world.

Like good teaching, the art and craft of research takes years to develop. The question, finally, is how useful, critical, or emancipatory it is to call what we are doing "research" without being a lot clearer as to what this means at different levels in different situations?

The form of action research texts

My final theme concerns the form in which we construct our action research texts. The question we need to ask is what textual forms might embody the plurality of voices of emancipatory action research? My plea is for greater flexibility and creativity (and I would equally include myself in this) in constructing texts which do not unreflexively conform to the norms of "the academic article", or "the thesis". We may of course choose to write in this way, but the point would be to develop a reflexive awareness of our own texts and how we use language. This is not easy, as Atkinson (1990:175) describes well:

> *There may be few unreconstructed positivists among contemporary social scientists, but there are many for whom the contrasts of fact and fiction, of rhetoric and science remain tacit articles of faith. But the Enlightenment's divorce of rhetoric from science should not be taken on board by those whose job it is to understand precisely how categories and contrasts like those are produced, shared and reproduced.*

Leading the thrust for innovation in the writing of action research texts have been Winter (1988, 1989) and Rowland (1990). Winter (1988:236), for example, has developed an intriguing argument for "fictional-critical" writing which he describes as a "non-unified form" which does not claim to impart knowledge about reality, but to raise questions about reality "through the unresolved plurality of its meanings". Atkinson (1990) similarly speculates that texts do not simply and transparently report an independent order of reality. Rather, the texts themselves are implicated in the work of reality-construction, seeking to persuade the reader of their plausibility. Winter (1988:237) gives us pause to think when he suggests that "the rational unity of the subject who writes, and the transparent clarity of the medium by which my words appear to relate to an external work are comforting, commonsense oversimplifications".

As Winter (1988:236) further deliberates, texts which work "towards unity, resolution and a comforting sense of how everything of necessity 'fits together'... [make] it difficult to think in terms of historical change or the possibility of things being otherwise". This would seem an important argument to consider for any research tradition laying claim to be "emancipatory".

Conclusion: Some difficulties and limits of emancipatory action research

In conclusion, then, I do not think that emancipatory action research will on its own create a revolution, nor liberate participants in the grand sense. There is no inherent guarantee that the research will empower without shifts in the material base of power relations. Nonetheless, action research's effect lies in those local, particular moments of transformation which arguably contribute to the long haul to create a just world. The point is to understand empowerment at all levels. Nor can one evaluate such effects immediately. Learning after all is not linear and its effects may show up in different ways over several years.

But, neither is action research the only route to critically reflective practice, as Zeichner and Liston (1987) note. It is perhaps somewhat extravagant to claim a direct and exclusive correspondence between action research and reflective practice, or between emancipatory action research and transformed practice.

Returning to the argument I developed at the beginning of this paper, I would like to close by reiterating that I think that the most questionable position is one of blind and tacit acceptance of any research paradigm without critical exploration. Is a search for certainty, truth and consensus compatible with emancipatory action research? Are fixed, unchanging and absolute values-in-action what we want? Or do we recognise that, as Elliott (1991a:50) proposes that "values are ever-receding standards" which cannot be defined as fixed benchmarks in advance of practice. Rather, he reasons, "values are infinitely open to reinterpretation through reflective practice".

In the end, the question we need to ask is not so much, What is emancipatory action research?, but Who and what purposes does our work serve? Whose problems do we try to understand through our research? I hope that the next two days will be an exploration of these questions refracted through our developing understanding of emancipatory action research.

Notes

1 John Elliott, 1991b:44

2 As a university based researcher in the Primary Education Project (PREP), I worked with 34 teachers in four township schools under the control of the Department of Education and Training (DET) from 1987-1989. Housed in the School of Education at the University of Cape Town, the project's main aim was to evaluate the potential of action research to improve educational processes and outcomes (see Walker, 1991). Although it was a period of massive educational upheaval, the transformation of schooling was nonetheless urgent and challenging. PREP was thus informed by the view that we might build tomorrow in the schools of today, exploring what was educationally possible within current school frameworks. As key agents in classroom change, teacher development was seen as central to this process of building quality primary schooling.

3 See for example, Walker, 1991 and Walker (in press) for teachers' reflections on their classroom practice and learning.

4 Compare for example, Lyotard: "It is widely accepted that knowledge has become the principal force of production over the last few decades" (quoted in NEPI Post Secondary Education Report, second draft, July 1992:1).

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Seminar reflections

Cyril Julie, Ashiek Manie, Joanna Nkosi & Brenda Sonn

In this section the questions and issues raised in discussions in the seminar are summarised.

First, there is the issue of the manner and style of reporting action research projects. Action research being situated in the realm of qualitative research methodology seems to require a form of reporting different from both conceptual and quantitative research. Current reporting and write-ups of action research appear to lean more in the direction of sociological accounts. In many of the projects, data are used in a verificationist way to support one or other conjecture and to affirm, disaffirm or question some theoretical perspective in action research and critical theory. The gravitation is towards "gurus" such as Habermas and Grundy and there is a sense developing that constantly referring to them contributes to the academic soundness of reports. The ethnographic style of thick data descriptions whereby the data are allowed "to speak" is lacking. The reporting of action research projects and selecting appropriate styles of writing are not simple issues to resolve. Notwithstanding the complexity of these issues careful consideration needs to be given to them so that they do not defeat the emancipatory goals inherent in emancipatory action research.

A second issue that is coming to the fore is the change ethic contained in action research. Action research deals with change and within the projects discussed in this collection this change has much to do with teachers changing their practice. Why should teachers change? Are teachers the obstacles? and Is it moral to want teachers to change because this belief is held by some other party? These are some of the questions that emerge for further investigation and discussion.

That action research is not inherently emancipatory is the third issue that came to the fore. Action research can lead to the improvement of techniques and efficiency, without actually challenging oppressive structures. It is only when a closer link between classroom practices and the socio-political context is made, that the possibility of emancipation can emerge. The question here is, Do we need an outside facilitator to bring about enlightenment? Do we merely import critical theory? Or both? The insider-outsider debate continues to be a cause of tension, and is closely associated with power relations. This requires that close attention be given to what a critical form of emancipatory action might mean.

Emancipatory action research has an overt political agenda. The quest to achieve political goals is encapsulated in phrases such as "a commitment to institutional and policy change ... to transform education as part of the broader political struggle for liberation". Are these political goals realisable? What about the achievement of political goals? Does the quest for achievement end when political goals are realised and is the "critical" then relinguished? These are questions surrounding the fourth issue that needs to be scrutinised.

To whom are action researchers accountable? Accountability is multi-dimensional and various stakeholders are involved. This involvement of various stakeholders brings with it the question of "voice". Action research is much driven by a People's Education ethos, within which a notion developed that the voices of students and teachers are equal. Are these voices not different? If the voices are different, with the teacher's voice having more weight, should attention not be directed towards restoring a *culture of teaching*? The neccesity to interrogate issues surrounding accountability emerged as a fifth area of concern.

Lastly, the notion of reflection warrants attention. At one level a position similar to Freire's position about thinking can be adopted. This position would be something along the lines that there is not a need to teach people to reflect – they can reflect already. The primacy of reflection in action research leads to the question of on what should be reflected. Is it on practice? On knowledge forms? On the political? All of these? Can all be reflected on simultaneously? If not, what should be suppressed and what highlighted? In *What we owe children: The subordination of teaching to learning* (New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1970), Caleb Gattengo writes:

> *There is one universal functioning without which nothing is noticed. This is the stressing and ignoring process. Without stressing and ignoring, we cannot see anything. We could not operate at all.*

Reflections of a non-participant

Owen van den Berg

Insiders and outsiders

One of John Elliott's truisms is that what distinguishes action research from most other research is that it is conducted by "insiders", by those actively involved in the dynamics of practice that are being investigated, as opposed to "outsiders", who visit the research setting for a while and then return to their, other, "real", place of work. As the seminar of which this volume constitutes the "proceedings" took place while I was in the USA on sabbatical leave, I suppose that makes me an "outsider" – not that I will go on to claim that this enables me to comment "objectively" on those proceedings!

I can claim, in fact, to have been very much an "insider" to the activities of the seminar. Apart from the HSRC personnel involved, the other persons, almost without exception, are people with whom I have worked in some or other way – as colleague, in project activity, as teacher, or as thesis supervisor, or in combinations of these relationships. When the action research Masters programme was taken through the various committee stages at UWC in 1986, one of the arguments I put forward was that this could lead to the formation of a "critical mass" (a notion I stole from Fullan's work on innovation) of action researchers who might influence classroom practice and thinking about education in a critically constructive way. Looking at the list of participants at the seminar, I have the sense that, at last, that critical mass is beginning to emerge.

Groups of "insiders" have the advantage of being able to pursue their doubts and certainties in a "safe" context. When, however, that safety zone becomes cosy, then in-groups lose what ability they have had to be critical, and their discussions may well consist of little more than the pooling of ignorance. This arrogant insularity is what Paul Beard attacked about the mentality of the Fundamental Pedagogues:

> *The educative act can be scientific only if the educator is a Pedagogue and the Pedagogue must have received an education in Pedagogics (the science). If the educative act does not look like being Pedagogic, only the Pedagogue can modify it, because of his (sic) grounding in Pedagogics (the science). In view of the Pedagogue, being what he is, he alone as a Pedagogician can transform the educative act into a scientific one. We have a situation whereby it is logically impossible for anyone but a Pedagogician to transform education into an autonomous, ontic science* (1981:241).

The seminar provided not only an opportunity for a group of "insiders" to meet, but also to gather with them some "outsiders", and that is a critical development: it is a development that allows for critique. To have no "safe" place for discussion and reflection is calamitous, but to have only such a safe place is nothing short of catastrophic. The critical mass that I hoped would emerge has begun to appear. The mass (albeit a small one) is there; whether it is/ becomes/remains critical is a major challenge for those of us committed to the development of a critical educational praxis. In that spirit I wish to focus on four matters that arose in the seminar and which attach themselves to my own particular interests, preoccupations and musings. I hope they prove provocative for my readers, insiders and outsiders alike.

Innovation

In the preface, Dirk Meerkotter foresees the seminar "as an opportunity to discuss our work at the University reflectively and rigorously, particularly in respect of emancipatory education and the action research projects in the Department of Didactics" (i-ii). I would like to enter into that discussion by asking the question, well, why are we doing action research? One reason I had for deciding to set my flimsy action research ship afloat – or, at least, to water – in 1986 was that I had developed a hunch that it constituted an innovation strategy that was more promising than most. I was committed to political and educational change, and saw action research as one way forward.

In a dramatic extempore riposte to a swashbuckling paper delivered by Bruce Joyce at an international conference in Hong Kong in 1989, John Elliott said – and I hope my memory does him justice – that there were essentially three approaches to educational innovation. The first he termed the Cecil B. de Mille approach, with a cast of thousands "participating" in an activity precisely preplanned by the director – a large-scale, Research, Development and Diffusion approach to educational innovation, and one that essentially views the teachers as irrelevant in the process beyond being seen as rational and unwavering implementers of changes designed by others. Cecil B's "actors" were not actively involved other than in being expected to carry out precisely what somebody else had determined. They were not acting, merely acting out – the script was not theirs. The evidence is that such approaches to educational innovation simply do not work.

The second approach Elliott called the John Wayne approach to innovation – Joyce's approach, according to Elliott, except that for a weapon Joyce chose the video camera rather than the six-gun. This, parodied, is the teacher-as-problem-but-we'll-shoot-them-into-shape approach to innovation. This, teacher-as-pathology, model has also failed very largely in the innovation industry across the world. Power-coercive strategies have a poor record.

Trying to find a noteworthy name to link to his own approach, Elliott proposed the Jane Fonda approach to innovation – much soul-searching, with attempts to develop personal health and vigour via extensive exercise ("practice"?). It recognises the centrality of the involvement of the persons supposed to be bringing about the required or desired change, also in formulating what the change should be. It involves the "ownership" of the teacher, to draw on Fullan again. In adopting action research I believed, with much of the emerging literature on educational innovation, that teacher "ownership" and teacher "voice" were crucial, if innovation were to occur. This did not make innovation unproblematic, it simply meant that imagining change while regarding teachers as irrelevant, as the target or, simply, as "the problem", was bound to be inadequate. If supporting that view results in my being associated with Jane Fonda, I can live with that.

The point I am after here is twofold. First, that when we take decisions about the type of educational activity we intend to be involved in, lurking behind and within it is a theory of innovation – if I do this rather than that, then something is more likely to happen. So that makes my spending my time in this way more defensible for me than spending it in other ways. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, very often the theory or notion of innovation that drives us to particular practices is implicit rather than explicit.

I think we need to spend much more time making explicit our views of change, for I think that that can help us to see the fact that at least some of the differences that occur when we interact are symptomatic of our holding different views about innovation. And, certainly, we need to understand that innovation is a complex, fragile endeavour that is very likely to fail, and that is very likely to engender feelings of pain, fear, frustration, confusion, ambivalence and the like in those undertaking it. Certainly Maureen Robinson emphasizes that complexity in her paper (67), and Melanie Walker tells of how she "had underestimated the difficulties of doing emancipatory action research, and even of facilitating action research at all" (107) in her PREP project. We should certainly not treat innovation as unproblematic and, when we engage in educational activities, we should attempt to be or become clear about the assumptions ("theories") of innovation that underlie and underpin (and possibly undermine) our endeavours.

As I read Wally Morrow's opening remarks, for instance, I feel that they betray the view that he does not regard action research as a particularly useful or defensible approach to innovation. Having posed his four questions for the consideration of the seminar, he cannot resist the temptation of making a dramatic exit from the stage by saying, "I have to confess that as I write these sentences they simply raise further riddling questions ..." (8).

My knowledge of Morrow's writing would suggest that when he deals with issues close to his heart and in ways he feels comfortable, he does not exit the stage muttering about "further riddling questions". Why might this be so? One reason, I would suggest, is that he has *other views* about how one might more usefully seek to promote innovation, and that perhaps they have something to do with developing rational discourses in engaging in the problems of education. That is the *practice* I suspect he would promote rather than action research: it is (as I say, I suspect) that *practice* that he considers a more useful and defensible one than the practice action researchers wish to pursue.

I do feel, however, that his *view of innovation* remained hidden in what he said or, at best, was only implicitly asserted, and that enabled him to throw arguments or "riddling questions" (which are much more undermining little monsters than mere "riddles") against action researchers that perhaps he does not always throw out against his work in philosophy of education.

Let me take an example. Morrow asks, for instance, a penetrating and absolutely legitimate question, "Is it possible to do action research in the fields of cycling, playing tennis or musical performance?" (5). That, of course, foreshadows a broader question, what is research, but certainly a great deal has been written – Edwin Shils on tradition, for instance – about the complexities of practice in comparison with the simplistic "explanations" of practice arising from technocratic rationality. Equally certainly, as an avid and nervous motorcyclist, I have benefitted from the writings of others on the topic, apart from having developed a healthy respect for the relationship between theory and practice in my own attempts to deal with some tight corners and strong cross winds. And, certainly, all action researchers who have read the Founding Fathers (for male they were) will be most interested in research cycles!

So let me ask back to Morrow. Is it possible to "philosophise" about cycling, tennis or instrumentalising? If so, or not, why do you ask this question of action research and not of your own work in philosophy of education? A challenge we all face is to be prepared to subject our own work to the same types of critique as we would level at the work of others – the missionaries to whom Morrow refers might phrase it, "go ye and do likewise". Furthermore, as action researchers we must accept that our work creates amibiguities and antinomies, and we would like to assume that our colleagues working in other fields also experience such ambivalences and contradictions – "riddling questions" – in their work.

Perhaps the most useful thing we can do is to bring different groups of "insiders" together for critical, friendly discussion – "this is how we deal/fail to deal with this issue, how do you people deal with it or similar issues?" I have said to Morrow, and to others who are agnostic or downright atheistic about action research, that I do not consider action research to be *above* critique, but that I also do not consider it to be *beneath* it. It would be good to engage in real debate about action research with people who have a great deal to teach us, had they but the energy or interest to so do. Otherwise we shall struggle to develop that critical mass, and by default.

But let me leave this point with a quotation from Clifford Geertz, which I think is a challenge to all of us seeking to make sense of the world and of the problems of practice, even though he is speaking specifically of ethnography:

> *The claim to attention of an ethnographic account does not rest on its author's ability to capture primitive facts in faraway places and carry them home like a mask or a carving, but on the degree to which he (sic) is able to clarify what goes on in such places,* ***to reduce the puzzlement*** (Geertz, 1973:16, emphasis added).

In dealing with our puzzlements, our "riddling questions", we need to be critical friends – and I do not mean friendly critics – of one another. Part of that challenge, I believe, resides in our attempting to make our implicit views about innovation more public and open to scrutiny.

The hegemony of theory

The seminar had as its focus, it seemed to me, a preoccupation with clarifying certain key concepts, such as what is meant by emancipatory education. I think that is a laudable motive, and certainly in working with a number of students on action research theses – my involvement to date has been with over thirty such activities – I have found myself to be faced with what I might call "emerging irritations", which usually meant that I had (at last) reached the point of needing to obtain further clarity – or at least to do some more systematic thinking – about some of the key assertions or assumptions that we were making in our work.

One such irritation in some recent thesis work has been what I can only term a genuflection to Habermas. Now, I think Habermas's work is and has been very important, not least because of the impetus it gave to Brian Fay's writing, which in turn has played an important role in weaning years of UWC students from their sets of assumptions about the way things are. On the other hand, Habermas's threefold categorisation of human interests is often viewed as so "neat" that it seems to become almost irresistable to action researchers out to impress one with how emancipatory their work has been or become.

I strongly believe that we need to "de-guruise" action research, and establishing some critical distance from our essentially superficial understanding of the work of Habermas is one step in that direction. At least Sandra Kriel in her work took the trouble to read Habermas himself, and not just self-styled interpreters of his work, like Grundy (and Fay), and Trevor van Louw's thesis (1991:11-30) offered a powerful statement of the Habermasian "kennisbelange" that was particularly useful for Afrikaans speakers who struggled with the English (let alone German) Habermasian texts and commentaries. Maureen Robinson adds her voice to this warning by arguing that "the boundaries between Grundy's categories of technical, practical and emancipatory action research become blurred, for what may appear a technical intervention to some may be emancipatory in other settings" (72). And Johann Mouton (86) adds the wise and delicious comment that

> *Critical theory ... has a fundamental* **practical** *interest in radically changing human interest, of fostering the type of self-consciousness and understanding of existing social and political conditions so that "mankind will for the first time be a conscious subject and actively determine its own way of life"* (Bernstein, 1976:181, emphasis added).

My concern about a too-quick-and-easy fixation with Habermas-as-interpreted is, perhaps, why I found Cyril Julie's reference to the work of Skovsmose and the three types of knowledge "that can be delineated when thinking about the development of democratic competence" (28) so refreshing and provocative. We need to expose ourselves to different sets of metaphors in thinking about our work, and so Julie's typology was energizing:

(i) Domain-specific knowledge – the concepts, facts, ideas and the knowledge-generation mechanisms of the domain.

(ii) Pragmatic knowledge – knowing how and when to apply and use the artifacts of the domain.

(iii) Reflective knowledge – the interrogation of the assumptions underlying how knowledge is used, applied and legitimised in its particular way and the consideration of what the implications are if different assumptions are injected (28).

So, yes, certainly we need to take our theory seriously, and that entails also developing a sense of the importance, as Melanie Walker says, that a critical theory be "critical of its own authorities" (101). And so, yes, it is good that the seminar gave so much energy and attention to the challenges of conceptual clarification.

That said, however, as action researchers we also need to remind ourselves that our primary preoccupation is with the problems of practice. Elliott often reiterates this commitment, as in the following quotation, that the central distinguishing feature and function of the action research movement is

> *to improve practice rather than* ***to produce knowledge****. The production and utilisation of knowledge is subordinate to, and conditioned by, this fundamental aim* (1989:4, my emphasis).

Now this does not mean that action researchers should take up a cavalier attitude towards theory. I think it means, rather, that they should take seriously a theory that sees "theory" and "practice" as dialectically informing, and should dispute theory which sees something called theory as some superior realm to which practice must be subservient.

Sometimes, in theses I examine, there is the "theoretical" chapter, followed by the student's account of the action she engaged in, and then the final chapter in which she says "what this means for the theory". This is close to allowing a particular theory of theory to become dominant, and forces one to enter into debates with others on their terms.

Another way to approach a thesis, I think – and I speak colloquially – is to say something like, well, this is what I set out to do, and these were the sorts of thoughts and understandings that enraged my mind, and when it was all done, then only did I go and read some of the guru's (who seem never to have engaged in any of the practice I've engaged in) and this is what I found interesting about what they said and what I thought before, during and after my action.

That, I think, puts a different slant on the status of "theory", and helps us avert the danger that, while we claim to be so interested in improving practice, actually what we want is for our work to be seen as theoretically respectable (and theoretically respectable on somebody else's terms) and thus to be valued as a "contribution to theory". As action researchers our instinct should be to arrive at theory via the problems of practice.

Donald Schön draws on Dewey to argue that the situations of practice are not mere problems to be *solved* but "problematic situations characterized by uncertainty, disorder, and indeterminacy" that frequently embroil practitioners in "conflicts of values, goals, purposes, and interests" (1983:15-17). What is more,

> *the problems of the high ground ... are often relatively unimportant to clients of the larger society, while in the swamp are the problems of greatest human concern ... those who choose the swampy lowlands ... involve themselves in messy but crucially important problems and, when asked to describe their methods of inquiry, they speak of experience, trial and error, intuition, and muddling through* (1983:42).

And so Schön takes as his central concern the challenge of attempting to articulate the

> *epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict* (1983:49).

"In the end", commented Melanie Walker at the seminar,

> *the question we need to ask is not so much, What is emancipatory action research, but, Who and what purposes does our work serve?, Whose problems do we try to understand through our research?* (120).

As action researchers, as would-be innovators, we must be concerned with the problems of practice. If the dominant preoccupation of the academic mindset is one that would "theorise" by soaring above practice in order to pontificate upon it from on high, then we should be wary of it, engage it and dispute it, not simply abdicate to it or pay obeisance to it. As action researchers we must arrive at "theory" via the problems of practice.

How might one think about "theory" in relation to social phenomena? Lou Smith offers the following in discussing his own mindset in dealing with research narratives (his own and those of others):

> *If the key terms of the theory – for example, education, curriculum, and teaching – contain value statements in their very structure ... then an "objective", "scientific" theory of education is impossible. An educational theory which has ethical components in its core concepts is a very different theory from one which is "scientific". ... Nonetheless,* ***as I read observational reports,*** *the criteria I tend to focus on at the theoretical level are these: First, insightful distinctions, that is, novel concepts, propositions, and perspectives that tell me something about the phenomenon that I did not know before. Second, clear definitions of new concepts, at the semantic or theoretical level and at the operational. Third, a cumulating glossary of investigator's research serial. Fourth, the interrelations of ideas into patterns or concatenations ... or more abstract formal deductive systems ... Fifth,* ***I want the findings to be useful, that is, helpful in solving problems when I'm working in the same broad domain either as a researcher or a practitioner.*** *All this seems to be a way of saying that the theory should be a novel, comprehensive, internally consistent, and functional, a reasonably conservative view of theory* (Smith, 1979:360, emphasis added).

After all, as Smith and his colleagues put it in a later ethnographically-flavoured innovation study,

> *Our conceptualizations are not nomothetic-deductive structures or "theoretical palaces". Rather, they are tools of instruments for thinking about the problems at hand, in this instance, innovation and*

change. They seem generalizable enough and powerful enough to look at other settings far removed from Milford [the school district they were researching] (Smith *et al.*, 1988:259).

As action researchers, we need to show *due respect* to theory, no more, no less.

Thick description

Action research, said one critic, has to be written down, or else it is mere action inquiry. But that is not enough: qualitative research must have some pretensions to quality – and I am reminded of the comparative educationists' distinction between "real" comparative education and "travellers' tales". Which brings me to another of my emerging irritations in action research: the difficulty so many people seem to have in producing a thorough recording or narrative of their practice in order to reflect on it. Often I find myself, having read page after page, at last succumbing to exasperation and writing something like "But WHEN are we getting to the action?" Full of sound and fury, signifying very little? If action researchers wish to claim that their work is to make sense and be of use to others, then it has to offer rich descriptions and interpretations of the action engaged in.

There might be said to be two important requirements for action research narratives to be worth their salt – they need to be historically sound, and they need to be ethnographically adequate. And one needs to add that these requirements are crucial to any claim action research work might make regarding its epistemological credentials. In this regard, I was interested to note that Sue Davidoff, in discussing the need for action research to be collaborative and democratic, didn't deal with the epistemological aspects of that imperative. Phillips, in his trenchant critique of the work of qualitative researchers like Elliott Eisner and Bob Stake (1987:94), says that behind their anti-positivistic and pro-qualitative rhetoric there "lurks an epistemology that is scandalously charitable, for it lacks an explicit recognition of the need to put knowledge-claims to the test". So, what of history and ethnography? Our work, ultimately, stands or stumbles to the extent that its narratives and interpretations of those narratives are compelling.

First, then, history. Hexter, talking about creating an historical record, sees it as a matter of two "records". The "first record" is "the record of the past as given, as a *datum*, as opposed to "the vast expanse of human activity which has left no surviving record whatever" (1971:81). The historian's "second record", on the other hand, is

> *everything he [sic] can bring to bear on the record of the past in order to elicit from that record the best account he can render of what he believes actually happened in the past. Potentially, therefore, it embraces his skills, the range of his knowledge, the set of his mind, the substance, quality, and character of his experience – his total consciousness ... what each historian brings, his second record, differs in some measure from the second record of any other historian* (Hexter, 1971:80).

So, as action researchers, we need to take history seriously. As C. Wright Mills put it long ago (1959:144, 151), "every social science ... requires an historical scope of conception and a full use of historical materials", and above all we need to fear "historical provincialism: the assumption that the present is a sort of autonomous creation".

And so, in action research we the actor-researchers have to bear in mind other wise words from a while back, those of E.H. Carr, who said sometime that "Before you study the history, study the historian. Before you study the historian, study his [sic] historical and social environment". And so we need to come clean on who we are, these two-legged research instruments. As Sarah Delamont states it,

> *Every researcher is her [to be consistent, sic] own best data collection instrument, as long as she is constantly self-conscious about her role, her interactions, and her theoretical and empirical material as it accumulates. As long as qualitative researchers are reflexive, making all their processes explicit, then issues of reliability and validity are served* (1992:9).

Which rather overlaps with the second requirement I am suggesting, that action research work needs to be ethnographically adequate. So what is ethnography? Hammersley and Atkinson argue (1983:2) that for them

> *ethnography (or participant observation, a cognate term) is simply one social science method, albeit a somewhat unusual one, drawing as it does on a wide range of sources of information. The ethnographer participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned.*
>
> *In many respects ethnography is the most basic form of social research ... [and] it bears a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of the world.*

The challenge is to make the routine rich, to transmogrify the travellers' tales into texts of authenticity. Taken together, these historical and ethnographic imperatives call for due recognition to be given, according to Margot Ely, to three themes:

1. Qualitative research is a group of disciplined procedures. As qualitative researchers, far from engaging in "soft" research, we are to be people who

> *hone our observational skills, who work as collaborators-in-research with the people whose lives we seek to describe, who engage in increasingly productive ethnographic interview technique, who surmount the seemingly insurmountable tasks of in-process, recursive analysis, meaning-making, and reporting* (Ely, 1991:102).

2. Qualitative research honours tacit knowledge. It is not only that the subjects of one's study know a great deal that is unspoken, and use it in important ways, but the researchers themselves

> *do not attempt to separate themselves from what they know tacitly or, for that matter, openly. They listen to their hunches. They attend to the seemingly unrelated sense of direction that pops into their heads at odd moments ... [and attempt to] lift the tacit from an unspoken to a voiced level; one that can be checked out in many, but not all, cases* (Ely, 1991:104).

3. There is a dependence of the researcher-as-instrument, for qualitative researchers cannot

> *point to the test, the sampling procedures, the statistical treatment, the outside expert. They can only point to themselves, and to how they decided to sample, to treat data, to work with others, to confer with experts, to carry out their research, and to share their findings* (Ely, 1991:103).

To return to Clifford Geertz, it is not the data collection techniques that define the enterprise,

> *What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, "thick description"* (1973:6).

A further point must be made, and that concerns the aesthetic of writing. Sue Davidoff, in her Masters thesis, stated (1993:105) that

> *This thesis has attempted to document the developing understandings that have been gained through systematic reflection, both on the part of teachers with whom I have worked, as well as myself. This systematic reflection (and the learnings that emerge from such a process) have been deeply enhanced* ***by the writing I have done.***

Yet, while we expend huge amounts of energy on "theory" and "methodology", Atkinson reminds us, blandly, that "(s)ocial scientists are not much given to thinking about writing" (1990:1). He reminds us that Sociology, like other social scientific textual formation, "is a rhetorical activity" (1990:10), and that "the conventions of text and rhetoric are among the ways in which reality is *constructed*" (1990:2). And so Morrow's dramatic exit and my response to it have to be seen for what they are – also rhetorical stratagems. "The narratives and descriptions, the examples, the characters and the interpretive commentary are woven together in a highly contrived product", says Atkinson (1990:2), and we need to cultivate our sensitivity to text, the interpretation of it and the production of it. We need to take "poetics" – the study of conventions whereby the texts themselves are constructed and interpreted (1990:3) seriously, and understand how they comprise highly contrived documents intended to convey meanings and win allegiance in very specific ways.

So let me say to our critics (but also to us action researchers), if you *really* want to find our soft underbelly, don't go after our "theory", but look at the adequacy of our historical and ethnographic record, for that is what we claim is really important. Smith and his co-authors agree, but with a caveat:

> *The data problems, the metatheoretical dilemmas, and the theoretical stance all contribute a context to the narrative. The individual ethnographer in doing his [sic] work is faced with a series of contingent questions. He who would judge a particular piece of ethnography faces a task no less complex* (Smith *et al.*, 1988:353).

And therein the caveat: critique us on what we say and claim, rather than on what (from your neck of the epistemological and theoretical woods) you think we should be saying and claiming. You will find enough to critique, and you will really help us. For we need to pay much more attention to garnering the record, locating it historically, interpreting it richly, and writing it compellingly – an aesthetic of research.

The personal

In what I have written above a great deal has come about "the personal" – the need for our different personal viewpoints about innovation to be made manifest rather than being left implicit; the importance of personal "ownership" of innovation stategies if they are to succeed; the extent to which the qualitative researcher has to be seen (after Delamont) as "her own best data collection instrument", so that (after Carr) we need to study the historian before we study the history produced by that historian, and so on. Yet at the seminar there seems to have been a deafening silence about "the personal".

I suspect that another of the differences of focus between action researchers and those who differ with them has to do with this emphasis on "the personal". But, perhaps even more important when we are seeking to address issues surrounding an *emancipatory* educational practice is my concern that within the ranks of the supporters of critical/radical pedagogy there is a wish to focus on the *political*, so that any discussion of individuals and their personal histories and pathologies is somehow seen as too individualistic and thus as fundamentally un-radical. I think this is a dangerous and self-defeating attitude. Davidoff argues the point as follows:

> *My own position is that implicit in emancipatory action research ... is a theory about personal transformation and the potential for facilitating a process of personal, professional **and** political transformation. Without these areas being made explicit and conscious, action research is not necessarily sufficient for this transformation to occur* (1993:58).

About what happened at the seminar I can only speculate, but maybe it was felt that there needed to be some decent theorizing about emancipatory action research, and that to drag "the personal" into that would be inappropriate. To reiterate Davidoff's point, the personal dimension is "an implicit, yet undertheorised and minimally understood, aspect of emancipatory action research" (1993:58) – and, like our views of innovation, it is time for it to be made an explicit part of the problem.

The final point I wish to argue, then, is that we need to face the challenge of focusing systematically and openly on the personal dimension of our action, our research, our ways of making meaning of the world, our ways of reporting on all that in our writing, and our understanding of the dynamics of innovation. We seem to have an almost Victorian repression about these things, and within universities particularly there seems to be an attempt to denigrate such topics as "un-academic".

Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:36) remind us, however, that

> *Teachers are people too. You cannot understand the teacher or teaching without understanding the person the teacher is too ... And you cannot change the teacher in fundamental ways, without changing the person the teacher is, either ... Teachers become the teachers they are not just out of habit. Teaching is bound up with their lives, their biographies, with the kinds of people they have become.*

Smith and colleagues agree:

> *If one doesn't know where an innovation fits in the life history of the individuals who are participating in the innovation, one has limited understanding of the dynamics of the process of schooling. The individual's perspective, that is his or her definition of the situation, depends on a complicated belief structure or system, which, in turn, arises from the accumulated life experience ... Innovation is not just a technical problem, not just a political problem, nor just a cultural problem ... In our view, innovation is also a person problem ... the ignoring of such ideas seems one of the major limitations in understanding the phenomenon of innovation* (1986:86, 224).

In recent years there has, in fact, been a burgeoning of work related to teacher biographies, life histories and the like. A "life theme" has been defined as

> *the affective and cognitive representation of a problem or set of problems, perceived or experienced either consciously or unconsciously, which constitutes a fundamental source of psychic stress for a person during childhood, for which that person wished resolution above all else, and which thereby triggered adaptive efforts, resulting in attempted identification of the perceived problem, which in turn formed the basis for a fundamental interpretation of reality and ways of dealing with that reality* (Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979:48).

Gould (1978:14) has followed a similar line in arguing that

> *adulthood is not a plateau; rather, it is a dynamic and changing time ... With each step, the unfinished business of childhood intrudes, disturbing our emotions and requiring psychological work.*

And Davidoff, in working to facilitate action research with teachers in a range of settings, came to believe ever more strongly in the extent to which coping with innovation arouses very personal responses and is significantly influenced by the personal meaning worlds of the people concerned, which in turn is heavily influenced by vagaries of their personal histories. She argues (1993:60-61) that

> *How we experience ourselves consciously in the world, I believe, is actually only a small part of who we really are. Buried under this conscious 'self-experience' is a world of unconscious feelings and responses to the world which profoundly affect the way in which we*

> *perceive and respond to our environment. As a result of this, the "unpredictable" nature of change is made even more unpredictable because of the existence of those virtually inaccessible layers of ourselves through which our life experiences are filtered. Change is likely to be threatening to most people; unconscious attitudes towards these changes can make the process even more difficult, confusing and intense ... To the extent that we cannot, or do not want to acknowledge these (unconscious) aspects of ourselves, or conversely, to the extent that we long to express those aspects, we are likely to project them onto others.*

Innovation, let alone transformation, is difficult and problematic, even unlikely. It certainly requires political change – as Walker said, "I do not think that emancipatory action research will on its own create a revolution, nor liberate participants in the grand sense. There is no inherent guarantee that the research will empower without shifts in the material base of power relations" (119). It certainly will not be achieved, miraculously, by achieving theoretical clarity – as Mouton warned the seminarians, "any simplistic notion of 'emancipation' should be rejected. The naive belief that social theory will automatically lead to enlightenment, which in turn will empower people to liberate themselves clearly requires revision" (96).

In addition, however, we also need the realisation that any faith that we can bring about transformation without focusing on the personal is equally naive. In the ongoing debates concerning the relative impact of structure and agency in bringing about change we need to make sure that our sense of agency does not reside in an ideologised view of human beings that would deny their personal histories and their propensity and power to make sense of the world in ways other than we consider functional for change. Change, in Fullan's truism (1991:65), is "technically simple and socially complex".

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ISBN 0 7969 1535 0

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